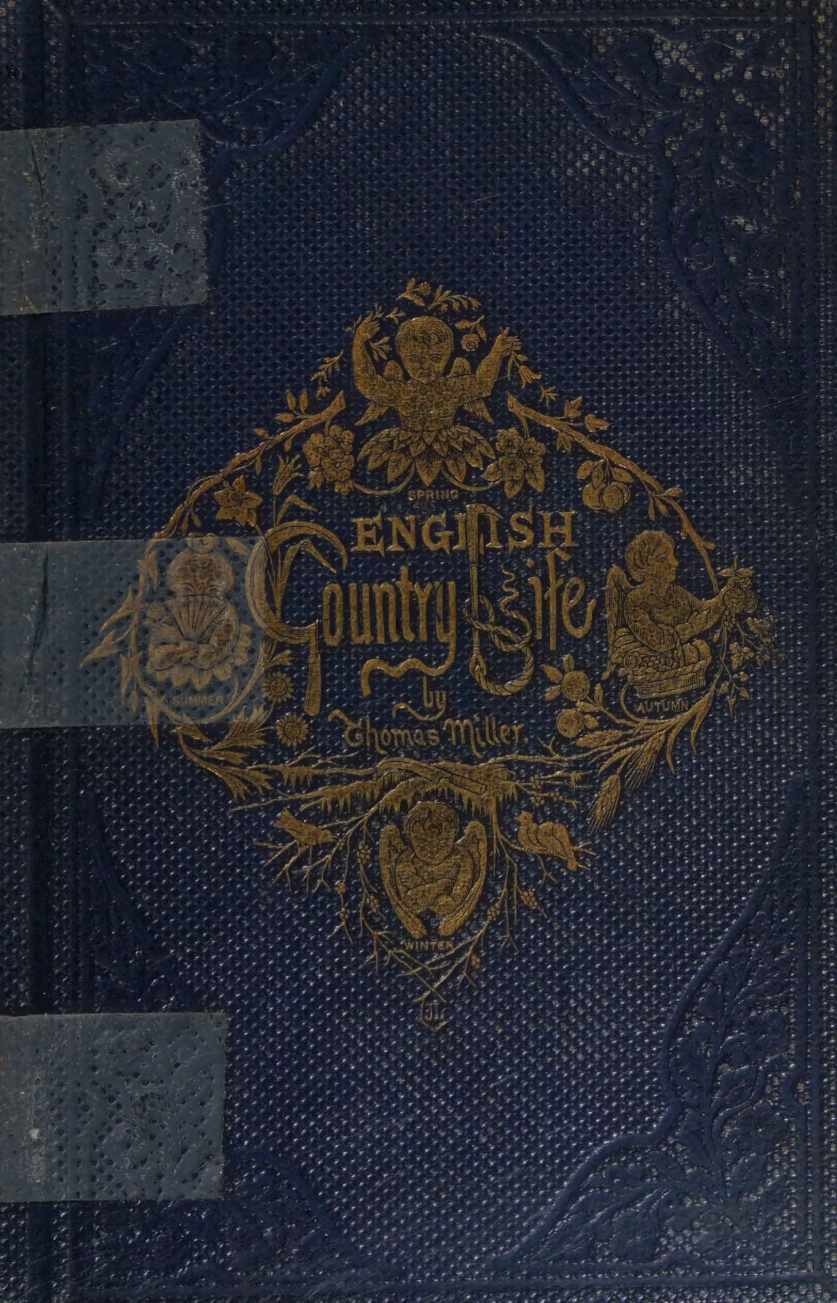

SPRING
ENGLISH
Country Life
by
Thomas Miller
SUMMER
AUTUMN
WINTER

LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
EDUCATION AND CULTURAL SERVICES.
This book should be returned on or before
the last date shown below.

11/01/06

LINCOLN CENTRAL LIBRARY
Tel: 01522 510000

WITHDRAWN
FOR SALE
LINCOLNSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

MILLER

English Country Life: Consisting of descriptions of rural habits, country scenery, and the seasons

MILLER

English Country Life: Consisting of descriptions of rural habits, country scenery, and the seasons

L.88

MANCHESTER
PUBLIC LIBRARIES

THE COUNTRY.

ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

CONSISTING OF DESCRIPTIONS OF RURAL HABITS,
COUNTRY SCENERY, AND THE SEASONS.

BY THOMAS MILLER,
AUTHOR OF "A DAY IN THE WOODS," ETC. ETC.

WITH NEARLY THREE HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS, BY BIRKET FOSTER,
JOHN GILBERT, WILLIAM HARVEY, ETC.

LONDON:
ROUTLEDGE, WARNES, AND ROUTLEDGE,
FARRINGDON STREET.
NEW YORK: 18, BEEKMAN STREET.
1859.

11/01/06

LINCOLNSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

PREFACE.

THE author has attempted to embody in this volume whatever is most beautiful or poetical in country life and scenery; to exhibit the most pleasing and interesting features of natural history, without giving all the dry details of the learned naturalist; to show the beauty of plants, flowers, and trees, openly and simply as they grow, in a clear and common light, without enacting the part of the botanist; and to render that descriptive and readable, which has too often only found a place in the table of the calendar. Like a painter in producing a picture, the author has striven more for general effect, than to make a display of skill in the minute delineation of every leaf, flower, and blade of grass.

He has also portrayed old customs and festivals as they, to his own knowledge, existed in many a village in merry England in his boyish days.

In writing a work on the country, no author can wholly depend upon himself: he must of necessity have recourse to the writings of others: he may add something of his own, but, most of all, he must strive to show, in a new

and favourable light, that which is already done; for he has not power to create anything, however small:—

> Though man has power to build a town,
> He cannot make the thistle-down,
> Which every light wind shakes.

He must hack and hew at the rocks of knowledge to get materials to make a road to lead to those great strongholds, somewhat easier than that generally found winding through our great encyclopædias, if he wishes to be understood by every-day people, who possess only common sense. Although most of this volume is original, the author has great hopes of the few extracts, that occasionally enrich his pages, elucidating matters on which he felt a delicacy to decide, for he has now and then inserted the opinion of others, after having given his own, even when at variance with the author's view of the subject, having had no wish to play "Sir Oracle."

As the author spent the greater portion of his early life in the country, and has since then dedicated much time to the perusal of the works of the poets and others who have written on rural subjects, he cannot plead incompetence for his task; for when an author has lived to write some thirty or forty volumes on various subjects, he knows his own power, and ought to care but little for either the praise or censure of those anonymous advisers who are too clever ever to be known in this common, hard, work-a-day world at all; for if he is not master of his craft after having served above twenty years' apprenticeship to literature, he never will be.

In this volume the author has attempted to allure his readers to visit the poetry of Nature; to walk over the

flowery fields, and only occasionally stoop to examine the beauties on which they tread; to wander into old woods, contented with the delight they produce, without looking too closely into their wonders; to ramble on the banks of rivers, and either read or angle, he cares not which, so that they will but begin to think or look upon the beautiful rural world in which they live. He has endeavoured to write a work that shall do good, as well as afford pleasure, and give a new change of thought to those who imagine that happiness is only to be found in gay society, and in cities, hoping to persuade them to turn their eyes to the green fields and fragrant woods, and see how much that is pleasant and beautiful they leave

"To waste its sweetness on the desert air,"

almost wholly unregarded.

An acquaintance with the country, and a love for its beauties and ever-varying scenes, are necessary to form the mind to a just appreciation of painting, poetry, and music. We judge of the merits of a picture according to its resemblance to Nature; of poetry, by the emotions it produces, and the illustrations which it affords of all that is pleasing in earth, air, sea, or sky; of music, as it brings to our ears the sound of waters, the song of birds, or the rustling of the wind among trees and flowers—to say nothing of those greater emotions of joy and sorrow, despair and hope, which it produces. Neither are these all: the quiet of country scenery is like a resting-place for the mind: there is a tranquillity that draws the thoughts from the busy world, and makes us conscious that we live for nobler ends than to accumulate wealth. Well did old

John Evelyn exclaim, in one of his enthusiastic bursts of eloquence on woods, "Here, then, is the true Parnassus, Castalia and the Muses; and at every call in a grove of venerable oaks, methinks I hear the answer of a hundred old Druids, and the bards of our inspired ancestors. In a word, so charmed were poets with those natural shades, that they honoured temples with the names of groves. In walks and shades of trees poets have composed verses which have animated men to heroic and glorious actions. Here orators have made their panegyrics, historians their grave relations, and the profound philosophers have loved to pass their lives in repose and contemplation."

There are many beautiful scraps of poetry scattered over these pages, the selection of which has required considerable care. Some of these, it is hoped, will not be lost upon the reader, as they will serve to prove how much even Genius is indebted to Nature in

"Giving a local habitation and a name"

to its lofty imaginings.

Although the author has written some half-score or more of volumes on the country, yet on none has he bestowed so much care and labour as on the present work; which, were it only for its beautiful illustrations, must stand at the head of all his country books.

THOMAS MILLER.

LONDON,
December, 1858.

Page

THE COUNTRY 1

SPRING FLOWERS.

SPRING FLOWERS—CELANDINE—VIOLETS—POETRY OF FLOWERS—EARLY BEES—MARCH MARIGOLDS—BUDS IN SPRING—WALLFLOWERS—PANSIES—LIVERWORTS—DAFFODILS—GORSE—MOSS AND LICHEN—COTTAGE GARDENS—CHILDREN IN SPRING—"MARCH MANY-WEATHERS" 21

GREEN APRIL.

GREEN APRIL—DAISIES—A GREEN LANE—POETS AND FLOWERS—MEADOW-STREAMS—COWSLIPS—HOLY-FLOWERS—BROOKS AND WATER FLOWERS—BEAUTY OF SPRING 32

BIRDS IN SPRING.

BIRDS IN SPRING—POETS AND BIRDS—NOTES OF BIRDS—MISSEL-THRUSH—SWALLOW—SAND-MARTIN — BUTCHER-BIRD — THROSTLE — SPARROWS — HOODED-CROWS—CUCKOO—ROOKS—CARRION-CROWS—BIRDS'-NESTS, ETC. . . . . P. 44

ANGLING IN SPRING.

IZAAK WALTON—RIVER-SIDE SCENERY—PLEASURES OF ANGLING—FISHES—OLD WORKS ON ANGLING—OTTERS AND WATER-SHREWS. 73

TREES IN SPRING.

BEAUTY OF TREES IN SPRING—ELDER—ELM—BIRCH—BEECH, ETC.—TREES IN BLOSSOM—GRANDEUR OF FOREST SCENERY—MAY-BUDS 87

SWEET SPRING TIME.

BEAUTY OF APRIL—COUNTRY ROADS—A VILLAGE—AN OLD PARK—THE MILKMAID—PROGRESS OF SPRING — LAMBS — MARKET-DAY PICTURES — PALM-SUNDAY — REPTILES—INSECTS—A RURAL SCENE—OLD MEMORIES 107

MAY-DAY IN THE OLDEN TIME 132

MODERN MAY-DAY 139

SUMMER TIME.

SUMMER-TIME—WOODS IN SUMMER—THE WOODBINE—CATTLE IN WATER—BYGONE SUMMER TIMES—SABBATH SILENCE—CITY CHILDREN IN THE COUNTRY . . . 145

SUMMER FLOWERS.

BEAUTY OF SUMMER—BUTTERFLY AND FLOWERS—ROSES AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS—ABUNDANCE OF SUMMER FLOWERS—CHILDREN IN THE WOODS—WANE OF SUMMER FLOWERS—BEAUTY OF FIELDS . . . . . P. 158

SUMMER IN THE FIELDS.

THE MOWER—HAY-MAKING—SHEEP-WASHING AND SHEEP-SHEARING-FEAST—A GIPSY ENCAMPMENT 172

A SUMMER WALK.

A VILLAGE CHURCHYARD—COTTAGES OF THE PEASANTRY—WOODLAND DREAMS—POOLS AND REPTILES—MOISTURE OF TREES—WATER-INSECTS—HEDGE-HOGS—HARVEST-MOUSE—A RURAL PICTURE—AN OLD FASHIONED ROADSIDE ALEHOUSE . . 192

BIRDS IN SUMMER.

SONG OF BIRDS—BULLFINCHES—BLACKBIRD—BLACKCAP—REDSTART—WREN—WOOD-PECKER—CHIFF-CHAFF—WINCHAT—LINNETS—GOLDFINCH—CHAFFINCH—WILLOW WARBLER—WHITETHROAT, ETC.—BERGARIC'S BEAUTIFUL RURAL SCENE—THE PEACOCK, ETC. 212

LIFE OF SUMMER 243

DEATH OF SUMMER 249

GOLDEN AUTUMN.

BEAUTY OF AUTUMN—AUTUMNAL LANDSCAPE—FALLING LEAVES—PICTURESQUE OBJECTS—ORCHARDS—SEA-SIDE SCENERY 263

HARVEST-TIME.

CORN-HARVEST—RUTH AND BOAZ—REAPERS AND GLEANERS—HARVEST-HOME—HERRICK'S "HOCK-CART"—SHAKESPEARE'S DESCRIPTION OF AN OLD ENGLISH MERRY-MAKING . . . . . P. 282

WOODS IN AUTUMN.

WOODS—NUTTING—SQUIRREL-HUNTING—BLACKBERRYING—A WILD WOODLAND SCENE—PHEASANTS—PARTRIDGES—CHANGING COLOURS OF AUTUMN—FOX-HUNTING—EARTH-STOPPER—AUTUMNAL SOUNDS 297

BIRDS IN AUTUMN.

WOODCOCK—SWALLOWS—MARTINS—PARTRIDGES—REDWING—CORN-CRAKE—AQUATIC BIRDS—FIELDFARE—CANADIAN GEESE—MIGRATION OF BIRDS—SKYLARKS IN AUTUMN—SNIPES—YOUNG ROBINS—GOLDEN-CRESTED WRENS 332

FOREST SCENERY.

FORESTS IN THE OLDEN TIME—SWINEHERD—SHERWOOD FOREST—STAG HUNTING—ORIGINAL INHABITANTS OF FORESTS—HAWKING—AUTUMN PICTURES . . . 356

CLOSE OF AUTUMN.

EFFECTS OF AUTUMN—GARDENS—ROADS—FLOWERS—HOPS—HIBERNATION OF ANIMALS—FLOODS—MIRROR OF THE MONTHS—FUNGI—METEORS—WATERFALLS—SPIDER-WEBS—DECAY OF LEAVES—WINDS—END OF AUTUMN 382

DARK DECEMBER.

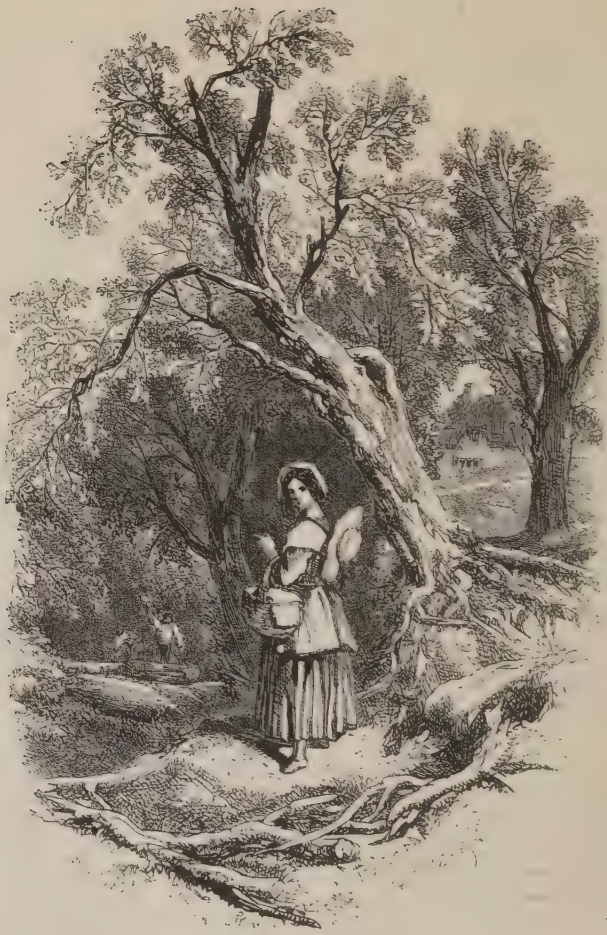
CATTLE—SHAKESPEARE'S WINTER SONG—SLEEP OF ANIMALS—FREEZING SHOWERS—SNOW-STORM—WORD-PAINTING OF WINTER—WINTER ON THE WOLDS—LAPWING—MOLE—A SHARP FROST 411

MID-WINTER.

AN OLD SAXON WINTER—FROST—ROBIN—WOODS IN WINTER—SNOWDROP—WINTER NIGHT — TWELFTH-NIGHT — SNOW — ROSEMARY — PLOUGH-MONDAY — UNDATED ENGLAND . . . . . P. 439

END OF WINTER.

HEAVY FALL OF SNOW—WINTER WINDS—VALENTINE-DAY—SIGNS OF SPRING—HARE-COURSING—OLD SUPERSTITIONS—WINTER AMUSEMENTS 464



SPRING.

THE COUNTRY.

WOODS where the long leaves seem ever talking to each other! hills over which the winds that sweep smell as if they had been out all day gathering sweets from the flowers! who does not sit at times when alone and dream over these dreams? There are scarcely any in-dwellers of cities, having spent a portion of their lives in the country, or by any other means made themselves acquainted with the beauties of English scenery,

whose minds do not wander to such scenes when the sunshine is sleeping upon the streets. What thousands then sigh for the shade of green trees, the breezy banks of rivers, valleys waving with wild-flowers, and still lanes where the air is filled with the perfume of hawthorns! They remember the green glen where the violet sleeps buried in its own fragrance; the broad meadow white with daisies; and many a stream over which the flowers bend to kiss the murmuring waters; and this remembrance brings greater pleasure to the heart than all the sights and sounds of cities; for the love of Nature is deeply implanted within us. Take a child who can but just run—one who has never before set foot upon the beautiful fields, and see with what delight it will tumble among the long grass, and with what gleeful eagerness it will pluck up the wild flowers. Nor is this love ever wholly erased from the bosom, though more exciting but less pleasurable objects may for a time bury the feeling, as the withered leaves gather around the pale primrose and conceal its beauty. But watch some old man walking forth into the suburbs of our great metropolis in summer—even one who has been the votary of fashion: how eagerly he returns to the worship of Nature! how gladly he treads upon the greensward!—nay, he bounds over it with all the eagerness of boyhood, for his pleasure is the same; but what was before wild enjoyment is now softened down by those "years that bring the philosophick mind." How many there are residing in large towns, portions of whose lives have been spent in the country; but listen to their conversation, how often they "babble o' green fields!" They cannot forget the old mill with its wooden bridge, and the mill-wheel which, when in motion, threw up its "loosened silver in the sun;" the lane where they gathered woodbines, the high hills and shady trees, and the stream that ran with a drowsy murmur through the village in which they were born. How many are there also who work extra hours for days and weeks, that they may afford to spend a little time in the country? the heaviness of fatigue is forgotten in anticipated pleasures, for their thoughts are far away in the hoary woods, with old companions whom they have not seen for many a year. These

are feelings that grow around the heart, and throw out a bright halo, a holy light,—the cluster of lonely flowers that start out from the brow of the rock, and leave it not altogether desolate. I believe that if a greater number of pleasant walks and quiet shady places were to be found nearer to our large towns, thousands whom distance keeps within their own doors, or who attend tavern-meetings, would prefer the lovely haunts of field and park to the places in which they now congregate. Free access to woods and meadows, open hills and wide heaths, would do more good to the morals of the people than many imagine; for there evil dwells not, neither does sinful temptation love to be seen in the open eye of day, and "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her." Man was never yet driven to Heaven; but how often has he been lifted to the contemplation of its goodness and its glory while communing with his own heart in the silent walks of Nature? in the still twilight that rests upon old forests, and in the thoughtful moonlight, that is as solemn now as when it reigned over Eden! In a warning voice I call upon those who are daily voting away the remnant of our green fields to desist: our free walks over hills and valleys are of more value than fine gold: let alone the range of the forest-paths, the peaceful places where we can yet mark the changes of the seasons, and see the finger of God in His works, that set at nought the power of man. I venerate our old customs, our old churches, and our old footpaths—those free, brown, winding ways that lead over mountain and moor to the ivied temple whence issues the sound of holy hymns: but, oh! how I pity the folly of those who think that by chalking out the circle in which man is to walk, he will be walled in from vice! Religion cannot be measured by law, no more than a field can be saved from invasion by the magical word "Trespass:" men will not be driven to the church on a Sabbath; and it will be far better to leave the poor to find their own amusements, than tempt them to spend their Sundays in a worse manner. Even the religious and pure-minded poet, Southey, said—

"While some to the chapel stray,
I to the greenwood wend my way
To seek religion there."

I have no wish to see English sports on the Sabbath-day. The shouts of cricket-players and the huzzas of foot-ball parties would but ill accord with the solemn music of our church-bells, and the quiet, picturesque groups that emerge from long lanes and ancient footpaths to kneel like one family before the Almighty. But still, on such a day, there is no harm, neither is anything more delightful to a poor man, than to have the privilege of walking over some rich gentleman's estate: for he enjoys the wealth of his neighbour without envying him; he feels it is his own for the time, and lays the same claim to the fragrant breeze and the cool shade of the venerable trees as the lord of the estate. He sees the stately deer troop before him with as much pleasure as the owner of the soil; he enjoys a wealth which leaves the proprietor no poorer, and partakes of the happiness that renders others happy without diminishing their store; he feels that he has a share in the property, free from the fear of lawyers and title-deeds. And how little it costs the hereditary lord to give pleasure to thousands in the course of a year! His gamekeepers and groundkeepers need not be increased to look after depredators, and no respectable individual would wantonly commit an offence that might endanger so valuable a privilege. The poacher could make no use of it by daytime; and if he is bent upon mischief in the night, gates, and walls, and painted warnings will not deter him from entering. Look at the princely domains of Greenwich, Hampton, Kew, and the Parks of London,—by what thousands they are visited, on a Sunday, and almost every day in the week! Deer run loose; there are numbers of magnificent trees; yet, standing as several of them do, on the very verge of the metropolis, open to the invasion of two millions of individuals, how very few misconduct themselves, or either by word or deed call for the interference of the keepers! Think not that scenes like these can be always traversed without giving rise to holy thoughts. The distant view of the country, London appearing distinctly, and looked upon with its deafening din unheard—the majestic Thames flowing like sheeted silver, and bearing on its bosom ships from every quarter of the globe,—all these stir the soul to contemplation; and as the eye wanders,

the heart seems hushed, and there is a tranquillity about the mind which almost every one feels without investigating its cause. Let it not be supposed for a moment that I think lightly of our religion, or am advocating a negligence of even its most external forms. There is more truth than some might be led to imagine in

"Looking from Nature up to Nature's God."

It is impossible to contemplate the changes of the seasons without connecting them in some degree with ourselves. How closely allied is Spring with all that we remember of the heyday of our youth!—full of budding hopes and anticipated pleasures—cloudy days that were scarcely recognised in our eager watchfulness for the expected sunshine—showers that passed away like childish tears, or were forgotten even while they were falling, so absorbed were we in watching the gorgeous colourings of the rainbow. Life was then a wild field of flowers, over which breeze and sunshine chased each other: we but laughed as we rose elastic from the airy footsteps of the wind, or opened wider the beauty of our bells to catch the golden beams; even the showers were taken proudly to our bosoms, and treasured like costly crystals. Then came the full Summer of manhood—the tree of life—the realization of all our wishes; and we bore our "leafy honours" loftily, and exulted over the fulness of our foliage, and looked proudly down upon the flowers which were fading at our feet. There was a solemnity in our shadow which we knew not of: for the morning sun tipped our tops with gold, and the refreshing dew hung upon our highest branches, and the clear moonlight threw over us a mantle as of silver. Days were long and skies bright—even what little we had of darkness was whiled away as we listened to the voice of the nightingale; streams ran cheerily at our feet, and we forgot the progress of Time while we looked upon our own shadows in the water.—Autumn next advanced; but came with such muffled footsteps, that we heard not his stealthy tread, until the long nights left us leisure for contemplation, and the green trophies which we had so proudly worn were carried away by the wind, and "the sere and yellow leaf" careered over the naked valleys. Then

indeed we sighed for the tender green of spring; but all its flowers were dead—they had dwindled away unperceived, and the withered leaves lay in mockery in their places; we bent like mourners over them, while the wind shook our naked branches, and a warning voice called loudly from the clouded sky.—Then Winter shouted from the tops of the desolate hills, and we shrank from the winds we once had wooed, and gathered no refreshment from the falling showers; we heard no sweet voice in the heavy darkness; but in the silent snow we saw a ghastly face, and found the blackness of death upon the place where shadowy feet had trodden—a darkness left behind when all had vanished.

Let it not be imagined that changes like these are in nowise woven with our natures. The sadness of our spirits, arising only from a dull day, and the liveliness we feel in beautiful weather, all spring from deeper sources than we are willing to investigate. Changes of seasons, Summer and Winter, are silent messengers of the Creator, speeding on their mission in the sight of man, and holding a secret intercourse with the heart.

> "There are more things in heaven and earth
> Than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

There are fair spirits in the opening flowers, whose mute eloquence conveys deeper feelings to the soul than the voice of the greatest orator. There is a religious silence in the depth of hoary woods, which kindles solemn thoughts, and throws a dreamy repose over the mind, only surpassed by the perusal of the sacred pages, or the contemplation of the silent city of the dead. There is a phantom in the falling leaf, that steals noiselessly along, until mingled with the clods of the earth, that warns us to prepare for a future state. There is a sermon in the babbling brook, that murmurs in its steady course, until lost in rivers that are buried in the deep ocean. Let us then leave the sin and suffocation of cities, and look out upon the fair face of Nature—the loveliness that is yet rescued from the building hand of man. Let us visit the flowery nooks and secluded corners of green England, and they will serve us to think about all the long week; we shall catch a portion of their quietness and beauty, and the

mind will become a temple fit for content and peace to inhabit. Think how little of evil is found in these haunts!—the wind wafts no curse upon the ear; we are far from the smoke and pollution of cities, and feel the pure air as it is sent from heaven,

and exult in the glorious light that streams around us untaxed by man—the golden sunshine, and the silver-footed showers, that stream upon, and fall alike on all.

Perhaps there is no country in the world where green fields and quiet out-of-the-way places are more eagerly sought for than in England. I speak not of the enjoyment of them occasionally, but a wish to possess some such spot, which has stimulated many a man to industry, such as few save Englishmen can contend with. Look only at London! what numbers you see on a summer's evening, hurrying home to their picturesque dwellings, which lie mues away from the City. They care not for the fatigue of the walk—nay, it refreshes them after a day's application to business, and they feel a pleasure in knowing that they will meet a lovely wife and fair healthful children, or brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers, awaiting their return at the garden-gate: perchance their ears will be arrested by a sound of laughter echoing from the smooth greensward, where children are romping and tumbling over each other. Look at the healthful families that daily pour into the metropolis: they are not in-dwellers of the city, but live where the nightingale sings them to sleep in the evening, and where the early lark is heard carolling above the paddock on which their chamber-windows open. Many a father leans with aching head over his desk in the City, that his family may enjoy the pure air of the suburb: many a merchant plods through the dull and feverish calculation of traffic for years, that he may at last retire to some quiet cottage which he can call his own, and spend the remainder of his days in peace. And is there no love of Nature in all this? Watch some old citizen, seated in his little summer-house,—one who has been smoke-dried for nearly fifty years of his life,—view him eyeing his little garden, and you will at once discover that he feels amply rewarded for all he has undergone. These things are beyond the reach of the poor; but still, the heaths, and commons, and greenfields ought not to be. There is a pleasure in contemplating the wealth of others; and although we may never be so fortunate as to possess one of these paradises, still there is nothing to hinder us from occasionally enjoying ourselves in similar scenes. We

have yet left to us a few lovely places, where the flowers spring forth, and the shady trees offer a shelter, and the free birds carol as loudly as they did of yore.

Few can gaze upon a beautiful landscape without feeling a sensation of delight—not even those who are familiar with the

scene. I had often observed an old farmer, whom I was wont to meet upon the hills on a summer morning, rein up his horse, when he reached the highest summit, (which, when passed, shut out a view of the village and the valley beneath,) and always pause a few moments to gaze around. After a time, I became familiar with the old man, and ventured to inquire why he halted to look back so attentively? "I cannot help it," said he· "when I see my native place lying so quietly, and think of all my little

grandchildren sleeping so safely, and no burnings and battles coming near them, as they do in foreign parts, I can't help looking back, and blessing it from my heart." I had gazed times innumerable upon the same scene, for it was indeed a lovely prospect! The church spire towering above a range of goodly elms, and these peopled with clamorous rooks, who were all day sailing to and fro; the green meadows and distant marshes spreading out, with their rows of hedges and tall solitary trees; the low white cottages, with their little windows, partly buried in trellises of woodbine and ivy; the old wooden mill; the whitewashed school; cattle quietly grazing; the broad river rolling in the sunshine;—these were the objects that arrested my attention. But the old farmer, in the simplicity and fulness of his heart, saw master-touches in the picture which I had not then discovered. He had filled the old picturesque church with happy beings, who were hymning the praises of their Creator, and thanking Him for the blessings they enjoyed. In every cottage he had conjured up a family living in safety, harmony, and comfort. He had filled the ships that were floating on the river with plenty, which the free winds bore gladly to all mankind; and clothed and fed in his mind many a happy family with the cattle that lowed and bleated in the valleys, and with the golden grain that waved on the uplands. He mingled happiness with the purple tints of the landscape, and peace and comfort with the beauty and poetry of the scenery.

No one can fully enjoy the beauties of the country without carrying in his mind associations like these. The bare, external features of a landscape are always pleasing; but the great pleasure the picture affords is the quiet and comfort it brings to our fellow-men. A May-pole, for instance, is a pleasant picture of itself, standing in the centre of a village green, with its drooping garlands and fading streamers; and while we gaze upon it, we conjure up happy groups; we look back to the olden time, when our forefathers congregated around it, with music and dancing, and loud huzzas—when youth and beauty and childhood were wild with happiness, and old age threw aside its cares and pains, and shared in the universal glee: nor do we ever see an old

oak spreading its branches before an ancient farm-house, without thinking of harvest-home, and sheep-shearing feasts, and all those harmless, pastoral amusements which our ancestors enjoyed.

England is a beautiful country. Its green valleys, and verdant hills, and lovely woods, and sweet rivers running for miles through flowery meadows, seem only made for a happy people to dwell among. What souls have been kindled in England! Think not that our old woods, and venerable cathedrals, and hoary castles, and free hills, have been forgotten by our peasants when they have thrown aside the ploughshare and taken up the sword. No! I doubt not but many an arm has been nerved, and many a blow dealt home to the hearts of our enemies, in full consciousness that it was for the defence of some little village, where the trysting-tree was well remembered, and where the vows of love had first been plighted—a spot too holy for the foot of an invader to press. I reverence the classic lands of Italy and Greece, but not so much as I do my own country. I may to-morrow traverse the plains where Julius Cæsar encamped—where Alfred overthrew the Danes, or tread upon the spot where the rival banners of York or Lancaster have proudly waved. There is no solitude on the hills! You may walk in company with thousands there, although alone; throngs of armed men, and the deeds of other days, are around you! Nay, even while musing, you may be standing upon the grave of some one whose deeds have changed the destinies of a kingdom! Traverse the field where Magna Charta was signed, or where Hampden shed his blood in the struggle for liberty, and where many a noble deed was achieved, that England might be free!

I had often thought the labour of our peasantry during the summer months the most fatiguing that man could endure. I knew but little of cities then—I had not seen artisans working in cellars no larger than the kennel kept for a mastiff in the country. But since that time I have seen the dim lamp burning at midnight in dirty, unhealthy streets, where, by the papered window, the poor mechanic was labouring for the barest neces-

saries of life, without having even the pure air of heaven to comfort him. Nearly all my pity for the poor peasant vanished: I thought of the labourers in the balmy hay-field, amid the free winds, under a clear sky—of their meal by the fragrant hay-cock, or under the shadow of some goodly oak, cheered by a concert of birds. How different to the dark alleys of cities! Shakspeare put no other wish into the mouth of a monarch wearied by ambition and courtly cares, than to make him covet the contentment of rural life, as he exclaimed—

"O God! methinks it were a happy life
To be no better than a homely swain."

How much happier is the peasant sitting at his cottage-door, when the labour of the day is done, talking over the appearance of crops, the fine weather for harvesting, or any other topic that "smells o' green fields," compared with that of the labourer of the city, who passes his evening in a smoky tap-room up some narrow court! Surely, while the cottager throws off his jacket, after having done his day's work, and attends to the labour of his little garden, the mechanic, who has no such spot for either amusement or profit, may steal forth on a long summer evening, if it be but for an hour, into some of those delightful spots that spread around every city. I have always fancied that a glance at the fields or trees, where it can possibly be attained, sends one to slumber with a lighter heart.

Some have wrongly fancied that a life passed in the country must be devoid of interest. Such might be the case with those whose days had been spent in a constant state of excitement; but how happily and usefully life may be passed even in apparent solitude, let the works of Gilbert White and Bewick testify. To watch the progress of flowers, their periods of appearing, their different forms and qualities, the numerous insect tribes that hover around and within them; the habits of birds, the various forms of their nests, their departure and return; the different customs of animals, and the variety of trees,—are, in my estimation, far more congenial sources of amusement than can be found in cities. We discover something that adds to our knowledge—we gain another triumph over Nature, we progress in wisdom, and are led to admire and understand more the productions of the Omnipotent. We bring a bird into a city, imprison it in a cage—it sings—we are delighted with its music; and what more should we know respecting its habits, had there not been men who, having watched it in its secret haunts, can tell us its food, how it builds, what time it visits our country, and when it departs? But, even in spite of all this close investigation, we are in ignorance, and volumes have been written, and wise men puzzled, to discover the retreat of the swallow, a bird that resides with us during the summer, and then departs we know not whither for a certainty even now. What was it but the want of

a closer acquaintance with Nature that caused mankind in ancient times to worship the forms of animals, and kneel down to the sun, moon, and stars? Even in England our ancestors offered up adoration to the oak, and paid reverence to the mistletoe. Religion is strengthened by contemplating Nature; an investigation of its wonders, and a knowledge of the order and harmony which reign throughout the whole, prove the great goodness and wisdom of God—and when we have once begun to admire this wonderful creation, we shall not fail to reverence the Creator.

What stores of beautiful poetry have been written about the country! Old Chaucer knew no greater pleasure than to walk forth into the fields in spring, and watch the opening flowers, and listen to the song of birds. Listen to his adoration of the daisy—

"——————— When that the month of May
Is coming, and I hear the sweet birds sing,
And when the flowers are beginning for to spring,
Farewell unto my book and my devotion,
For now then have I also this condition,
That, above all the flowers in the mead,
Then love I most those flowers white and red,
Such that men do call daisies in our town.
I go into the fields and there sink down;
And leaning on my elbow and my side,
There all the livelong day I do abide;
And thinking of nothing else, there I lie,
All day looking upon the fair daisy."

The accent on the last syllable shows that this beautiful flower was called Day's-eye by the old poets, no doubt on account of its opening as soon as the "eyelids" of morning are uplifted. The fields which Chaucer traversed four hundred years ago look the same now as they did then.

Shakspeare loved the country at all times and at all seasons; for he who painted morning in such rich colours as the following must often have been upon the hill-tops when the sun arose.

"The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,
Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light;
And spotted darkness like a drunkard reels
From forth day's pathway, made by Titan's wheels."

He had also walked forth in the moonlight among old woods and fields, where herds and flocks reposed, and exclaimed,—

> "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
> Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
> Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night

Become the touches of sweet harmony.
——— Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold!
There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest,
But in its motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young eyed cherubim."

Spenser, too, loved "the salvage woods" and flowery valleys; and there is no poet who has described the beauties of Nature in a more admirable manner. Witness his description of May:

"Then came fair May, the fairest maid on ground,
Deck'd all with dainties of her season's pride,
And throwing flowers out of her lap around.
Lord! how all creatures laugh'd when they her spied,
And leapt and danced as they had ravished been!"

His picture of a natural arbour also shows how closely he observed the minutest forms of Nature:—

"And in the thickest covert of that shade,
There was a pleasant arbour, not by art,
But of the trees' own inclinations made,
Which, knitting their rank branches part to part,
With wanton ivy twine entail'd athwart,
And eglantine, and caprifole among,
Fashion'd above within their inmost part."

There is a smell of fields about Milton's writings; and when he became blind, he only lamented that he could no longer view the lovely aspect of Nature. He knew

"Each lane, and every alley green,
Dingle and bushy dell of the wild wood,
And every bosky bourn from side to side."

How beautifully does he scatter the fragrance of meadows over the imagination in his description of a citizen sallying forth to enjoy the beauties of the country!—

"As one who long in populous city pent,
Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,
Forth issuing on a summer's morn, to breathe
Among the pleasant villages and farms
Adjoin'd, from each thing met conceives delight;
The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine,
Or dairy—each rural sight, each rural sound;
If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass,
What pleasing seem'd for her now pleases more—
She most, and in her look sums all delight."

Neither should I pass by Cowley, who only wished, before he died, that he might possess a small house and a large garden in the country, where he could live and "love his old contemporary trees." He exclaims,—

> "Oh fountains! when in you shall I
> Myself, eased of unpeaceful thoughts, espy?
> Oh, fields! oh, woods! when, when shall I be made
> The happy tenant of your shade?"

Herrick also has painted the pleasures of the country in glowing language. His poetry teems with flowers, odours, and dews, clear waters, soft airs, and gentle sounds, bright skies, woodland solitudes, and moonlit bowers.

Cowper shunned the town, in which the works of man obscured those of his Maker, and sighed for mountain, river, forest,

and field; in which he was at last indulged more than falls to the lot of modern bards. He loved to hear the roar of

> "———— Mighty winds
> That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood

> Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
> The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,
> And lull the spirit while they fill the mind."

Byron, too, drank deeply at the fountain of Nature, and revelled in all her beauties. He inhaled the living fragrance of flowers; and the drip of the oar or the song of the grasshopper fell with music upon his ear. He loved to listen to the voice of birds breaking out for a moment into song, or the floating whispers with which his fancy filled the hills. The starlight dews stole not so noiselessly into the bosoms of the flowers, but that he heard their silvery feet descend. He read in the stars the poetry of heaven; and not a sunbeam, or breath of air, or a wandering leaf, passed by him unobserved. He trod the still caves and forests, the coverts of old trees, whose feet the waters kissed with murmurs. He loved

> "The populous solitude of bees and birds,
> And fairy-form'd and many-colour'd things,
> Who worship Him with notes more sweet than words,
> And innocently open their glad wings,
> Fearless and full of life; the gush of springs,
> And fall of lofty fountains, and the bend
> Of stirring branches, and the bud which brings
> The swiftest thought of beauty."

From these he gathered his magic hues, and gave them forms of undying loveliness.

I pass over many an immortal name whose works will be read with a greedy delight when long years have glided away, and even the place that gave them birth is forgotten:—Scott, whose descriptions will live while heath, and lake, and mountain remain;—Wordsworth, on whom the spirit of Nature fell like gentle dew on a sleeping lamb;—Rogers, whose poetry is stored with deep thought, and crammed full of images of delicate beauty;—Thompson, whose "Seasons" can never die;—Goldsmith, whose "Deserted Village" will be remembered while the English language lasts;—Bloomfield, whose "Farmer's Boy" is filled with pictures of rural life;—Shelley, who has thrown a spell over solitude, and made the wilderness a garden of beauty;—Keats, who soared on eagle-pinions over the earth, and stooped to pick up its beauties at pleasure;—Wilson, who bounds like a

wild deer through wood and over mountain, and sports upon the solitude of the lake with all the freedom of the bird that was reared among its sedges ;—and Leigh Hunt, who has held communion with the green leaves, and made love to the blushing flowers. Many a name yet lingers on my pen, whose works have brought the freshness of forests to my hearth, and the smell of old hills to my pillow—who have borne me to the margin of cool streams, and thrown over my imagination the rustling of green branches ; all of them dispensers of God's beauties in thousands of lovely forms.

Many of those good old country customs which the earlier poets have celebrated are fast decaying. Merry Christmas, with all its morrice dances, and quaint and innocent pastimes, only exists in a few retired villages. The May-pole only rears its honoured head in a few out-of-the way places, where modern fashions have not yet penetrated. Kiss-in-the-ring, and all those outward signs of mirth and love-making, when love was not ashamed of the blessed daylight, have almost all vanished. The joyous shout of harvest-home has nearly died away. The woods in which we wandered in little groups a-nutting are now forbidden ground. England is wiser now than of yore, but is she happier? Where is the merriment that echoed over her hills, in the days when bells rang merrily and bonfires blazed? Thy wide halls and open doors are narrowed now! The huge ox no longer roasts before the piled fagots! The gurgle of thy berry-brown ale has dribbled down to potions of poisoning gin! The linsey-woolsey garments of our grandmothers, and the coarse broadcloth that our forefathers wore, are cast off; and with them, I fear, a great deal of the simple honesty of their true English hearts. But then they had not our Mechanic Institutes' lectures, music halls, libraries, book clubs, and, more than all, our cheap literature—reprints of works which can be purchased for as few pence as they cost shillings in those brutal bull-baiting and cock-fighting times. Conventionality and the weakness of living for appearance are not English, and were unknown to our true-hearted and truth-telling forefathers: these are the great plague-spots that disfigure the present age.

But, however man may change, Nature is still the same.

Spring ceases not to put forth its flowers, and summer yet wears its green drapery of leaves: the autumn comes in, crowned with plenty and bending beneath its load of corn and fruit; while winter, in spite of its storms, renders more cheerful the comforts of our fireside. Many a wealthy city-man, on a hot summer's day, has no doubt often envied the smock-frocked peasant, as he has seen him drive his team from the metropolis, knowing that in a few hours he would be in the midst of pleasant farms and delightful villages, listening to the song of birds and gazing upon the beauty of flowers; while the dull dead-walls, and narrow streets, with all their din of voices and rattling chariots, have been all that was left for him to gaze upon.

"For the soft quiet hamlet but seems made
For those who their mortality have felt,
And sought a shelter in the green hill's shade,
Which shows a distant prospect far away
Of busy cities, now in vain display'd,
For they can lure no further; and the ray
Of a bright sun can make sufficient holiday"

SPRING FLOWERS—CELANDINE—VIOLETS—POETRY OF FLOWERS—EARLY BEES—MARCHMARIGOLDS—BUDS IN SPRING—WALLFLOWERS—PANSIES—LIVERWORTS—DAFFODILS—GORSE—MOSS AND LICHEN—COTTAGE GARDENS—CHILDREN IN SPRING—"MARCH MANY-WEATHERS."

HAT old full-cheeked trumpeter, March, though he blows but a rude blast at times, and shakes the little buds, which are just beginning to open their green eyes, is always a welcome herald, for he is the first that comes to usher in Spring; and Solomon must have heard the blare of that windy horn in the grey old years which have departed, when he aroused himself and exclaimed, "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

Under the sheltering hedge the golden Celandine—which children so often mistake for the Buttercup—will be found in flower, beside its paler sister the Primrose. How refreshing the cry of "Come, buy my pretty primroses!" it makes the heart of a smoke-dried city-man rejoice, especially if he passed his younger days in the country, and wandered in green and pleasant places with the companions of his youth—

"Ankle deep in lilies of the valley"—

to gather this early and favourite flower. The Anemone, too, that bows its silver-grey bell to every passing breeze, is now in bloom; and a pretty sight it is to see a whole bed of these delicate flowers in some opening of a wood, bowing all their heads together, as if paying reverence to the invisible wind, after which they were named; though why called by the Greeks "wind-flower," is not now known. Could it be because they first bloom in the windy month of March?

Often hidden under a withered canopy of last year's leaves, the modest Violet may now be found, sometimes betraying itself by its delicious perfume, which you inhale with delight, long before you have discovered the broad green foliage amid which this sweet scenter of the air lies nestled. It must, however, be a mild spring, to find it in perfection in blustering March; though it never fails to appear when April showers green the ground,—

"Making it all one emerald."

There are but some three or four spots in England where the Crocus grows wild, and covers an immense space of land; the largest extent I know, amounting to many acres, is only divided by a narrowish river from Kirke White's "Clifton Grove," and that is a sight worth seeing. Farther than the eye can reach the meadows are covered every way with the lilac-coloured crocus, and it is a pleasant sight to witness the scores of little children that dot the flowery landscape, as they stoop, roll, creep, and tumble about in every imaginable attitude, gathering and trampling down the crocuses; but an artist would love most to sketch some little girl that sits apart singing to herself, her bonnet on the ground,

and her hair blowing all about her bare neck and shoulders, while she scatters the lilac-coloured petals at her feet, or jumps up all at once and dances upon them, in innocent wantonness.

But above all those

"Pretty daughters of the earth and sky,"

we must place the Daisies, Blue-bells, and Cowslips; there is a look as of the face of heaven about them when blended together: the silver of the floating clouds in the daisy, the azure of the sky in the blue-bell, and a flush of golden sunshine in the deep yellow and crimson-spotted cowslip; and then they come so early, and are God's messengers, sent to beautify the earth, gladden the eyes, and purify the heart of man—holy relics of the Eden we have lost.

Where would the poet find his images of beauty, if flowers were to perish? they are the emblems of loveliness and innocence, the living types of all that is pleasing and graceful. We compare young lips to the rose, and the white brow to the lily; the winning eye is blue as the violet, and the sweet voice a breeze kissing its way through the flowers. We hang delicate blossoms on the ringlets of the young bride, and strew her path with flowers as she leaves the church. We place them around the marble face of the dead in the narrow coffin, and they become emblems of our affections—of pleasures remembered and hopes faded—wishes vanished, and scenes cherished in memory, all the more, because they can never return. We look to the far-off spring in other valleys—to the eternal summer beyond the grave, where flowers that never fade, bloom in those starry fields, which no chilly winter ever blew over. They come upon us in spring like the remembrance of a pleasant dream—a vision that hovered above us in sleep, peopled with shadowy beauties and simple delights, embroidered with the richest hues of fancy. Sweet flowers!—that bring back again the scenes of childhood—faces remembered in youth—the love that knew not it was love! Even in our rooms they conjure up images of the mossy bank by the river-side, where we so often gazed upon the early primroses. They recal the sheltered glen, darkly green, filled with the per-

fume of violets. The sweet song of the village maiden heard across the river again rings on our ears while we gaze on them, and we remember those modest eyes "that ever loved the ground."

The flush of early flowers, and the intervals of bright sunshine, now tempt the bees to come out, and you often see one go blundering abroad as if he were not yet thoroughly awake. You wonder where he has been hiding himself all the long Winter, for a single glance tells you that he is not a hive-bee, but has a home somewhere in the woods. He knows well where the "rathe" primrose blooms, and the little violets nod their blue heads; he loves also to peep about among the gorse bushes, to see if they have yet hung out their baskets of bellied gold, for he well knows that these contain good stores of honey, and beautiful they look with their burning blossoms, which seem like thousands of lamps hung round the walls of a green temple.

Beside the water-course may now be found the great March marigolds, which are as large as tulips, and a pretty sight it is to see them mirrored in a clear stream, with the deep blue sky

reflected far down below, seeming to lie like huge lumps of gold on the water; crowns for the nymphs who are loosening the roots of the water-lilies, so that their silver shallops may be unmoored and ready to float under the green shadows of overhanging Summer.

Nor is it the early flowers alone that give a cheerful look to the opening spring: there is a green flush upon the hedgerows which you see deepening every day. First a bud or two appears of a larger size; then we discover one that is beginning to expand, and it is wonderful after a shower and a few days of sunshine, what a size it has attained. Tens of thousands in the meantime have undergone the same change, all slowly and gradually increasing, until at the end of the week you are amazed to find that they have opened out into the full green beauty of Spring—the most tender and delicate of all the varied shades of green which the ever-changing year presents. The gooseberry-bush shows a dim glimmering of the same hue, more like the reflection of a colour, than the pale green it afterwards assumes, and this grows brighter and bolder every day, until the fan-like leaves are fully revealed, and so Spring weaves her delicate threads in the open woof of March; then Summer comes with a darker green in his leaf-filled shuttle, and in the same loom weaves the pleasant shadows which shut out the scorching rays of noon-day.

There is something very pleasing in looking upon the earliest flowers of Spring, in the snowdrop, the crocus, the first primrose, and the violet, that seem to stand upon the edge of Winter, coming, as it were, with timid and fearful looks, like "unbidden guests," who, instead of receiving a warm welcome, dread being driven over the threshold again by Winter, who sometimes claims to rule as host, although he has already, in promise, given up possession to the sweeter-tempered Spring. The early flowers of Spring also bring with them sweet and sorrowful recollections; they are fraught with the memories of childood and youth; they bring promise of brighter days, and we know that for a thousand years they have stood dreaming by the old wayssides of England as they do now, for on them Time leaves not

his grey foot-mark. The daisy that peeps forth early in March is the same, to look upon, as that which Chaucer worshipped,

when, nearly five hundred years ago, he went forth, and knelt lowly by its side, to do "observance to the Spring."

Above the green mounds which bury the remains of many a grey old abbey, and once-stately castle, the sweet Wallflower still waves. Time, which has, ages ago, hurled down the holy shrine and the strong battlement, has no power over the humble flower that yet blows about the ruined barbican and fallen keep. Though he hath levelled many a proud city to the earth, and dug the graves of many a stately temple, yet Spring has again visited the spots he left desolate, and thrown over them a beauty he is not permitted to destroy.

> Time came again, and so did Spring;
> The spot once more with flowers was strown;
> Nor could he see a ruined thing,
> So tall and thick the buds had blown.

The wallflower seems to beautify decay; and as the green ivy swings over the grey ruins of hoary centuries, we see that nothing is endurable but what is shaped by the hand of Nature, who renews what time destroys by her covering of imperishable green.

The double-daisy may now be seen in cottage-gardens; and if it is what Milton calls a "rathe (early) Spring," we also find his

> "Pansy freaked with jet"

in bloom. I scarcely know another flower that is called by so many pretty, simple, Old English names, as the pansy. It is Shakspeare's Love-in-idleness; heart's-ease; cuddle-me-to-you; kiss-me-at-the-garden-gate; three-faces-under-a-hood. "There's pansies—that's for thoughts," says fair Ophelia; but what thoughts they are to awaken, Shakspeare tells us not. She brings a daisy too—all Spring-flowers—and would give them some violets, but

> "They withered all when my poor father died."

The three varieties of liverwort flower about this time, and very pretty the purple, the blue, and the white look, when they come double. The yellow daffodil, with its green flag-shaped leaves, is also now in bloom, and gives quite a gaudy look to the moist places in which it still grows. Turn the flower upside down, and let the top of the petals rest on the palm of your hand, then you

will see illustrated the old couplet, so familiar to our ancestors, which says—

> "The daffidowndilly has come to town,
> In petticoat yellow, and a green gown."

Nor must the common butcher's-broom be overlooked, when we pass over the gravelly heaths; for it is an early bloomer, and very often has the start of the golden-gorse, or furze, though the latter sometimes keeps in flower all Winter long, when the season is very mild. The crow-foot now displays its flowers, which, says quaint old Culpeper, "Virgins, in ancient times, used to make powder of to strew bridal beds;" also, the common white saxifrage, with its five star-shaped petals, one of our earliest white wild-flowers, which makes quite a cheerful light in the rural nooks, where it loves best to bloom. The white, red, and yellow arch-angel, or dead-nettle, shows its flowers early, and very beautiful they are to look upon, examined closely, resembling in their folds the bloom of the snap-dragon, with speckled dashes like the inside of a foxglove.

Spring affords the best opportunities of witnessing the rich effects produced by moss, lichen, fungi, or liverwort, upon the trees. Here we meet with the gaudy and mingled hues of the rich green, the glowing orange, the pale primrose, the silver grey with browns of every tone, that go deepening down from dusky umber to the dark hue of the chesnut, until they sink into the jetty blackness which mantles the stem of the oak. Beside these, the dark green winding outline of the ivy is fully revealed, giving a Summer look to the trees it clothes, and trailing, here and there, in beautiful and slender lines, among their native branches. The little water-runnels, which have also been silent and ice-bound during the Winter, now come tinkling down the steep hill-sides, and roll in pleasant murmurs through the dim green meadows, as if they were hurrying along in quest of the flowers. The little leaves, which point out where the modest primrose will soon appear, are pleasant to look upon; and in our walk through the woodland, we discover the pale green blades which tell us that the blue-bells have already come up, and that ere long the ground will be covered with a hue bright and beau-

tiful as the face of heaven; for every way we discover traces of that unseen Hand which is busy with its silent work. You might fancy that a snow-flake still lingered here and there upon the meadows, until you find on a nearer approach that it is—

> "The daisy scattered on each mead and down,
> A golden crest within a silver crown."

You also perceive the cottagers employed in their little gardens, making preparations for the reception of Spring; the spade is brought forth from its hiding-place; seeds, which have been carefully preserved, are hunted up, and even a few of the earliest sown; while, in the garden fence, the little hedge-sparrow, not less industrious, prepares the nest which is to contain its "sky-stained eggs." Even the very changes of the weather, which seem for a time to check these operations, are silently forwarding them. The snow that occasionally falls, warms and nourishes the tender buds; the winds dry up the over-abundant moisture: mists, fogs, and rains, all bring their tribute to enrich the earth, and do His bidding, who gave us "seed-time and harvest." The rank decay of vegetation—the exhalations that are ever arising—the insects that burst from their larvæ state—and the poor blind worms that burrow through and loosen the soil, are all doing their allotted work, and, though disregarded, are assisting man to prepare the soil, while

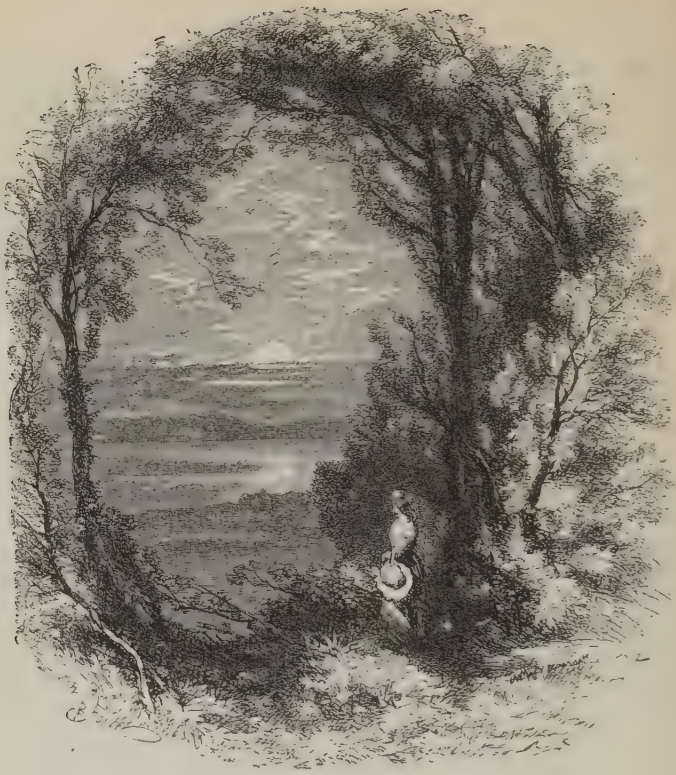
> "Surly Winter passes off
> Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts;
> His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
> The shatter'd forest, and the ravaged vale;
> And softer gales succeed."

Cottage doors and windows are again thrown open, and we see the jug of wild-flowers standing on the window-sill, round which some solitary bee is humming. We also again hear the merry voices of children in the village-streets, or see them peeping under the sheltered hedge-rows, searching for Spring-flowers; for the cheerful sun, who makes all glad and innocent things happy, has called them forth, and thrown his great golden mantle around them all. As you wander along the green lanes, and brown highways, which are powdered with grey March dust, you

sniff up that sweet earthy aroma, which is loosened and scattered on the breeze by the ploughshare, one of the purest of all Spring perfumes; and while you inhale the healthy scent, you fancy that it has come from the hidden flowers, which lie buried under the ridgy furrows, until their time for arising arrives. We hear the pitiful bleating of some little lamb above the ploughman's merry

whistle, as it stands shivering beside the budding hedge, seeming to look with saddened eyes upon the flowerless field, and on the tiny daisies, which are just beginning to see out of their white-rounded eyes. Anon the lark springs up, and is carried away by the loud March wind, which he seems to hear not, as he tries how a little music will sound, in the great open orchestra of the sky, after the silence that has reigned there, through the dark nights and short days of Winter: he sees the Spring-flowers below, lifting up their pretty eyes to look at him.

We have now the great jonquil, and the scented jonquil, with its rich stem of velvet-looking flowers sending forth "Sabean odours." The Roman and Oriental narcissus are also in flower; the latter distinguished by its beautiful fragrance, and well known as an ornamenter of bowpots; with all its varieties of pale yellow, with golden cups, and white, contrasted with orange, and these mingled with others of different hues, "an endless train." A long list of many others just coming into flower, or even now expanded if the weather is mild, might be added; but as a mention of too many of these adorners of the earlier Spring would lead the mind into Summer dreams, we will throw a March cloud over them, wishing to have it remembered that the winds are yet piping aloud, and the mornings too often piercing cold, and the days sometimes gloomy and overcast, with showers and sleet, and keen airs, that make the ploughboy halt to blow his nails, or beat his arms over his bosom until his hands glow. Still there is something lovable in the features of March; sunny skies and sunny showers, changing at times almost in an instant into shade, you see the bright sunlight moving over the young grass, and making the tender green look almost like yellow; then in a moment all is dull—a cloud has passed over, and the golden tints have vanished.



GREEN APRIL.

GREEN APRIL—DAISIES—A GREEN LANE—POETS AND FLOWERS—MEADOW-STREAMS—COWSLIPS—HOLY FLOWERS—BROOKS AND WATER FLOWERS—BEAUTY OF SPRING.

WHEN green April appears we exclaim, "Spring is come at last," for there is a primrose colour on the sky,—a voice of singing in the woods, and a smell of coming flowers in the green lanes. Call April fickle if you will;—she is still constant as an attentive gardener, and who would wish to see her slumbering

away her hours only in sunshine, when the daisies are opening their pinky mouths for showers? Her very constancy is visible in her changes: if she veils her head for a time, or retires, it is but to return with new proofs of her faithfulness, to make herself more lovable, to put on an attire of richer green, or deck her young brows with more beautiful blossoms. Call her not fickle, but modest,—an abashed maiden, whose love is as faithful as the flaunting May or passionate June. Robed in green, with the tint of apple-blossoms upon her cheek, holding in her hands primroses and violets, she stands beneath the budding hawthorn, her young eyes fixed upon the tender grass, or glancing sideways at the daisies, as if afraid of looking upon the sun, of whom she is enamoured. Day after day she wears some additional charm, and the sky-god bends down his golden eyes in delight upon her beauty; and if he withdraws his shining countenance, she is all tears, weeping in an April shower for his loss. Fickle Sun! he, too, soon passes by the tender maiden, clothed in her simple robes, and decorated with tender buds, and hurries over his blue pathway through the sky, pining for the full-bosomed May, or the voluptuous June, and forgetting April, and her sighs and tears: he alone is fickle, while April is as constant to her own green and daisies as Love—that changeth not.

Oh! how delightful is it now to wander forth into the sweet-smelling fields; to set one's foot upon nine daisies—a sure sign that Spring is come; to see meadows lighted with a thousand flowers; to watch the skylark winging his way to his sunny temple in the skies,

"Singing above, a voice of light;"

or hear the blackbird's mellow lute-like voice ringing from some distant covert, among the young beauties of the wood, who are robing themselves for the flowery masque of Summer! All these are sights and sounds calculated to elevate the heart above its puny cares and trifling sorrows, and to throw around it a repose, calm and spirit-like. There is an invisible chord—a golden link of love—between our souls and Nature: it is no separate thing—no distinct object, but a yearning affection towards the whole of

her works. We love the blue sky, the rolling river, the beautiful flowers, and the green earth; we are enraptured with the old hills and the hoary forests; the whispering reeds say something soothing to us; there is a cheering voice in the unseen wind; and the gurgling brook, as it babbles along, carries with it a melody of other years—the tones of our playfellows, the gentle voice of a lost mother, or the echo of a sweet tongue that scarcely dared to murmur its love. Who is there that is not a worshipper of Nature? Look at the parties who emerge from the breathless alleys of the metropolis when Spring-flowers appear!—Listen to their merry laughter floating over the wide fields from beneath the broad oak where they are seated: the cares, and the vexations,

and the busy calculations of this work-a-day world are forgotten, and they loosen their long-chained minds and set them free to dally with the waving flowers. They join in chorus with the birds, and the trees, and the free streams; and, sending their songs after the merry breeze, triumph over pain and care.

How delightful, as Spring advances, to wander up some sequestered lane, scarcely different from the fields in respect to grass, so few are the vehicles that traverse it; the long high hedges on each side, and the tall trees that arch overhead, almost shut out every other prospect! On the shelving bank the beautiful blue periwinkle spreads itself, throwing out its bright leaves

and limber runners, or mingling its lovely flowers with the wild rose to which it has climbed. Hawthorns, which have never

been pruned, but left alone to the hand of Nature, have assumed the appearance of the skirts of a forest, so thick, so high, so

impenetrable have they grown. Later in the season the fragrant honeysuckle will dangle before you, sweeping across the face as if inviting you to inhale its odour; while the mossy banks rise high on each hand, forming a green and cool couch not to be despised. Oh! what a place is that for violets and primroses! what hundreds have been gathered there!—ay, perhaps, years ago, hoary old men can tell you how they wandered there in Spring when they were children, and filled their little pinafores, and came home laden with boughs of May. And many a sad mother recollects that lane, for there she plucked the flowers with which she adorned the coffin of her innocent child.—What numbers of birds assemble there! every step you take startles some sweet songster, who hurries away until you have passed into the sunnier fields. Even their nests are secure there: the depth of the hedges and the dark umbrage of the overhanging trees conceal them from the sharp eyes of the young urchin; or if he chances to catch a glimpse of one, the impenetrable barrier of old hawthorns and briars forms such an armed defence that, even if he carries off the nest, he is wounded in the struggle. These are choice places for snail-shells, some of them of the richest colours, striped with regular lines of crimson, and yellow, and black. The boys often collect them, and extracting the snail, press the points of the shells together, and he whose shell is first broken, is considered beaten: they sometimes find a shell that will break scores without being fractured, and happy is the lad who owns such a one!

Cotton must have seen some such spot when he exclaimed,

> "Good God! how sweet are all things here!
> How beautiful the fields appear!"

Spring-flowers stirred up the great Milton, as they had done Chaucer beforetime, causing the Blind Bard of "Paradise" to exclaim, "In those vernal seasons of the year, when the air is calm and pleasant, it were an injury and sullenness against Nature not to go out and see her riches, and partake in her rejoicings with heaven and earth."

What his feelings were when he could no longer see the flowers

at his feet, he himself has told us in language that can never perish :

"Seasons return, but not to me return
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn
Or night of vernal bloom, or summer rose,

Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me."

Still it was not wholly dark; for though blind, Milton could see through what Wordsworth calls the

"inward eye,
Which is the bliss of solitude:"

could call up scenes of remembered Springs and sweet flowers which he had once seen, and which would still hang up like undying garlands in the great picture-gallery of his memory, to be ever looked at when his "inward eye" turned thitherward.

How different from being entombed in cities, in dreary shadows of dark courts, where, if a sunbeam enters, it loses its way! —where we look around,

"And cannot see the heavens, nor the flow
Of rivers, nor hill-flowers running wild
In pink and purple chequer; nor, up-piled,
The cloudy rack slow journeying in the west
Like herded elephants; nor feel, nor press,
Cool grass, nor taste the fresh slumberous air!"

How sweet is the air you breathe in these green and fragrant places, compared with the smoke and stifling "life in death" of streets!—To open your eyes upon a scene, or traverse a path

"Winding through palmy fern, or rushes fenny,
And ivy banks, leading full pleasantly
To a wide lawn, whence one can only see
Stems thronging all around, between the swell
Of turf and slanting branches: who can tell
The freshness of the space of heaven above,
Edged round with dark tree-tops—through which a dove
Doth often beat its wings, and often too
A little cloud doth move across the blue!"

These beautiful extracts were written by that great poet, Keats. Who does not love to wander through lovely pastures, where cattle are feeding among a thousand flowers:

"Or by the osiers of a rivulet!"

where you may sit, as an old writer says, "Under a willow-tree by the water-side quietly, and, looking on the river, see some

fishes sport themselves in the silver streams—others leaping at flies of several shapes and colours! Or, looking on the hills,

you can behold them spotted with woods and groves; or, looking down the meadows, you may see here a boy gathering lilies and lady-smocks, and there a girl cropping cowslips to make garlands of, if it should be the pleasant mouth of May. And there so many flowers perfume the air, that you think that very meadow like the fields in Sicily, where the perfumes arising from the place make all the dogs that hunt it to fall off and to lose the hottest scent."

The clear, fresh mornings at this time of the year are very pleasant; we see the sun through a very gentle mist, and inhale the fragrance of early wild-flowers,

> "Which come before the swallow dares,
> And take the winds of March with beauty."

The cowslip is now seen in the meadows, with its rich gold peeps sheathed in delicate green;—hearken to Shakspeare:

> "The cowslips tall her pensioners be,
> In their gold coats spots you see;
> Those be rubies, fairy favours—
> In those freckles live their savours:
> I must go seek some dew-drops here,
> And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear."

The following allusion to the cowslip is beautifully made, though, I regret to say, I do not know who was the author. Going every morning into the churchyard to water the cowslips on the mother's grave is the poetry of imperishable affection. "When I awoke in the morning, I went up to the window. The first thing I saw was the church: I remembered that my mother had been lying out all night, and ran as fast as I could to the churchyard. The dark pit was not to be seen; nor could I find where it had been for some time. On the spot was a sort of mound raised up, like many others in the churchyard, covered with fresh turf, and bound together with osiers. One little cowslip was growing up among the grass—I was quite glad to see it; and every morning I went to look if the little buds were blown; and when the weather was very dry, I always watered it. After it had left off blowing, I never forgot it; but loved its little crimped, half-hidden leaves better than all the brightest summer-flowers. Now there are more than thirty cowslips on my mother's grave: a cowslip was her favourite flower."

I love to see flowers planted on a grave—they seem to form a link between the living and the dead—springing as it were from those we loved; as Shakspeare tells us violets would spring out of the buried form of "sweet Ophelia." What beautiful thoughts have sprung up through gazing on flowers! Even in the darkest ages they were called after whatever was the most

prized. Walk into any large garden, and you will easily discover by their names those flowers which grew around the abbeys in former times: there you will find the star of

Bethlehem, Jacob's ladder, St. Margaret, Solomon's seal, Our Lady's smock, star of Jerusalem, Our Lady's slipper, the passion flower, the Virgin's bower, and numerous similar names of plants, and other natural objects, taken from the principal subjects of adoration. Thus the pious vestals and friars, when they employed their leisure hours in the gardens of the convents, converted flowers, the most beautiful objects of Nature, into mementos of sacred objects.

How pleasant now to gaze upon a broad stream running through an expanse of meadow-land,—a few reeds skirting its banks, with an alder or two hanging over, in the shadow of which some trout has taken up his position! A fallen tree,

perhaps, extends across it, in the same situation as when it was blown down one stormy night, and it has never since been moved; the bark is worn away by the passing footsteps; and half-way out of the water stands a long pole, and this you must reach—if you can—to balance yourself on the rural bridge. What beautiful flowers grow upon the water! You look through the clear crystal, and see the entangled roots and loosened fibres swayed to and fro by the motion of the current. In the centre of the stream, where scarce an eddy moves, later in the season, lie clusters of white and yellow water-lilies, almost buried amid their large, shield-shaped leaves. The white ones look like carved ivory scattered upon the glassy pavement of a palace; the yellow-like spots of gold, enamelled upon a floor of silver. And the primrose-coloured water-flag lifts its broad blades of green above the stream, while the gaudy dragon-fly sweeps over its yellow flowers. High above all stands the tall bulrush, like a proud chieftain, only deigning to nod to the wind. And the waterpoa

has expanded itself at the feet of the long rushes, whose seedy heads hang like tassels in the sunshine. Occasionally a bird will start up from the sedge, and, winging its way between the water-flags, alight in the opposite meadow; or a frog plunge to the bottom, with a clear short sound; or a water-rat raise a plash

in the stream, then dive into his hole by the bank. Farther up, the black water-hen may be discovered sailing away like a fairy bark through the channels that run between islands of water-lilies, seeming the sole inhabitant of the brook and water-flowers.

Many a name is forgotten, or only known to old bookworms who have sung the charms of Spring, and volumes might be filled with beautiful extracts in its praise. It has ever been a favourite theme with the poets, and no end of prose writers too have done it homage: many a heart has been elevated in the dreariness of winter while perusing those beautiful descriptions which live in their pages. It is the season when Earth, arrayed in all her loveliness, seems beckoning, in her silent beauty, to man to leave the walled cities and set his feet among the flowers! The birds elevate their voices, and call us into the fields; and the waters sing a glad song throughout the livelong day, and would tempt us to view their cowslip-covered banks. Oh! how delightful is it now to sit in a valley where a thousand flowers are waving,—to lie stretched, as it were, upon a cloud of gold, on a bed of glittering buttercups,—to gaze upon those stars of the earth, the silver-rimmed daisies, shed profusely over every field and hill-side, as if the Earth had scarce room enough to exhibit all her spring-flowers.

BIRDS IN SPRING.

BIRDS IN SPRING—POETS AND BIRDS—NOTES OF BIRDS — MISSEL-THRUSH — SWALLOW — SAND-MARTIN — BUTCHER-BIRD—THROSTLE—SPARROWS—HOODED-CROWS — CUCKOO — ROOKS — CARRION-CROWS—BIRDS' NESTS, ETC.

LEAVING the far-off shores over the sea, numbers of our favourite feathered songsters return with Spring, to make musical the hills and valleys of green Old England. Some of our poets have called them the little nuns, that sing in our great out-of-door cathedrals, that are roofed with trees, whose green quivering leaves protect them from the rays of the sun. Another poet has daringly and beautifully called them,

"The little angels of the trees."

Quaint old Bergaric—whom I place in the same list as Sir Thomas Overbury and Izaak Walton, as a writer on rural scenery,—speaking of Birds in Spring, says, "A thousand voices make the forest ring with the sweet music of their songs, and the sprightful assembling of these melodious throats is so general, that every leaf in the wood seems to have taken the shape and tongue of a nightingale. Sometimes you shall hear them tickle a concert, another while they will drag and make their music languish; and by and by they passionate an elegy, by interrupted sobs; and then again soften the violence of their voices more tenderly, to execute pity; and at last raise their harmony, and what with their crotchets and warblings, send forth their lives and their voices together. Echo is so delighted with it, that she seems to repeat their airs only that she may learn them; and the rivulets, jealous of their music, as they roll away grumble, as if much troubled that they cannot equal them."

Few natural objects have furnished our old English poets with so many beautiful images as Birds—

"Bird in bower"

is an ancient word-picture of a fair lady in her chamber. Another poet, hearing a beautiful lady sing, discovered from the sweetness of her voice, whither the nightingale went to in Winter; for he found that the lute-voiced bird

"Wintered in her throat."

It is an old belief that birds mate or pair as early as Valentine-day. Chaucer makes mention of it in one of his poems.

To a lover of nature it is an agreeable study to watch the habits of birds, to note down, like Gilbert White of Selborne, their incomings and outgoings, beginning with the date of when they first appear in Spring, and are last seen before their departure in Autumn. From the earliest ages have the migration of birds attracted the attention of man. We find the turtle, the swallow, the crane, and the stork mentioned in the Holy Bible, in the book of Jeremiah, as "observing the time of their coming;" and Solomon marks the seasons by the return of the singing of birds. Some come to build and bring forth their

young—they then depart until the following spring—others visit us in the Winter, and as the fine weather approaches disappear, "each knowing their appointed time." The swift seldom stays with us longer than while its young ones are enabled to fly well—the swallow has been known to leave a late brood to perish in the nest, when they have not been ready for migration, so strong has been the impulse in the parent-bird to depart. Without being beholden to man for either food or

home, without any preparation, saving the momentary act of spreading out their wings, they set out, and return from their long journeys—pass over mountains and seas, cheer us by their songs, and delight us by their beauty, yet ask for no return from our hands. They are at once the inhabitants of the earth, the air, and the water, having all the elements at their command without the incumbrance of that heavy machinery which man is

compelled to have recourse to. In their songs we discover the sounds which indicate sorrow and delight, love and melancholy, the low sad wailing of grief, and that happy gladness of the heart which seems ready to burst for very joyousness—for such tones can the fanciful mind gather from their varied lays—such emotions do they awaken in susceptible hearts. For our part, we should almost as soon think of shooting at a little child as it sat singing to itself, and playing with the lapful of flowers it had gathered, as we should at a sweet song-bird perched upon a spray, and filling the wide green valleys with its silver music. Listen to what an old poet, who was contemporary with rare Ben Jonson, has said of the delight he felt in listening to the lays of these little choristers. He was wandering beside a river, and fancied that the first bird he heard was chiding the ripples for the murmuring sound they made, which seemed to drown the echo of his own sweet song, when—

> "There seemed another in his song to tell,
> That what the fair stream said he likëd well;
> And going further heard another too
> All varying still in what the others do;
> A little thence, a fourth, with little pain
> Conned all their lessons, and then sung again.
> So numberless the songsters are that sing
> In the sweet groves of the too careless spring,
> That I no sooner could the hearing lose
> Of one of them, but straight another rose,
> And perching deftly on a quaking spray,
> Nigh tired herself, to make her hearer stay."
>
> BROWNE'S *Britannia's Pastorals.*

One of the very earliest of all our singing birds is the missel-thrush, or storm-cock, as it is called in some parts of the country, for they say when it sings a storm is sure to set in soon after. No song-bird has caused more discussion among ornithologists than the missel-thrush, some contending that it has no voice beyond the harsh note it utters when alarmed. I have seen the bird, and heard it sing as early as February in the midland counties; there is no mistaking it for the throstle, as it is much larger, nor does its song at all resemble that of the

common thrush, containing few of the pleasing notes which the latter utters. Its notes are short, jerky, and loud. Its favourite food is the berry of the mistletoe, and a silly notion prevails amongst ignorant country people, that the seed of this berry will not grow until it has been swallowed and voided by this bird.

The "household-loving" swallow has now returned, and at the first dawning of day we hear its cheerful twittering on the roof, and however early we may set out to angle, there it is darting through the bridge, or skimming the water, as if its whole life was one continuous holiday.

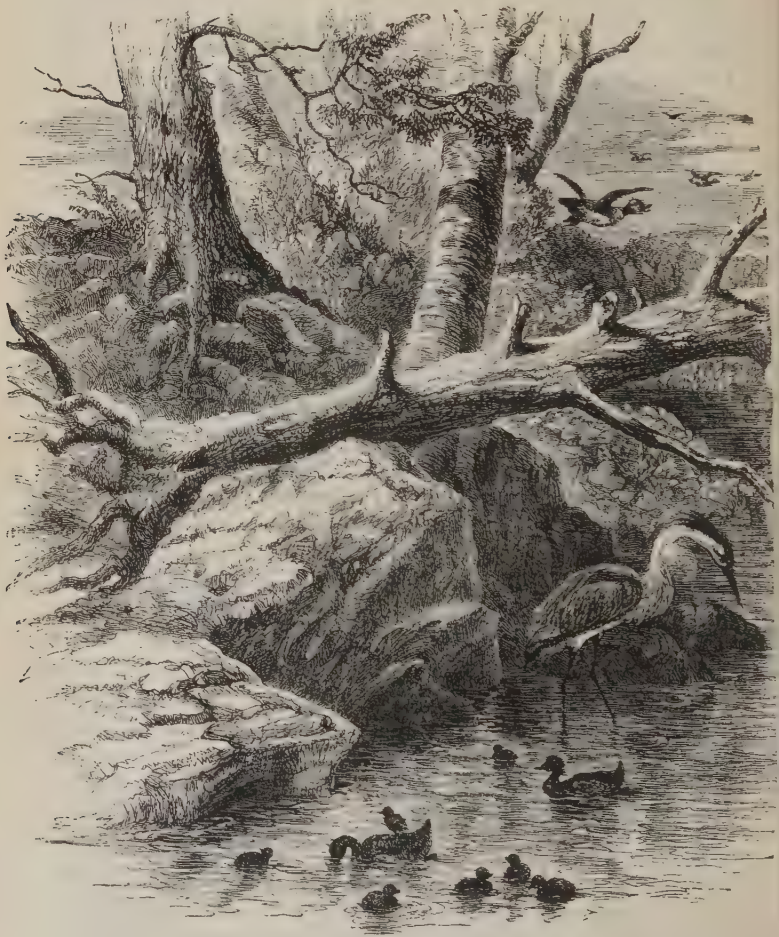
Still it is one of the most industrious of birds: beginning to build its nest at daylight, and often before the indolent slug-a-bed has risen—so far as building goes, the swallow has finished its day's work; for it rarely puts together more than half-an-inch of its nest at a time, then leaves it for that day, to harden, for if too much were built at a time, the wet material it works upon would by its very weight fall down, and all the labour have to be gone over again. To prevent this, the swallow never builds up more than a layer or two at a time, and when this is thoroughly hardened, works again upon it on the morrow. It is a pleasing sight to watch a swallow at work; to see it plastering away with its little chin, moving its head rapidly while it labours, and clinging firmly to the wall as it works, with its feet, and the pressure of its tail. Excepting when feeding its young,

it labours but for three or four hours a day; the rest of its time is spent in playing with its companions, and seeking for food, which appears to form part of its amusement. These birds have often been observed in a dry season to wet their plumage, and shake themselves over the dust, which is not moist enough for the purposes of building, until they have got it into such a plastic state that it will readily adhere—such an action surely evinces a reasoning power. "One swallow does not make a summer" is an old adage, and to see two or three skimming about is no proof of the general arrival; and frequently a week or more will elapse, and it will be drawing towards the close of April, before they are seen in large numbers. It is the opinion of most naturalists that the old swallows pair before they arrive in this country, and that such are the earliest builders—the young and inexperienced, who commence housekeeping for the first time, are often the latest in rearing their broods. There are some people who do all they can to prevent swallows from building; I number none such amongst those whom I am proud to call my friends.

The swallow is as familiar to those who live in a neighbourhood, where there is a river, or pond, or a sheet of water, as the common house-sparrow, and such cannot fail to mark its dexterity while on the wing—catching insects, skimming the water, and wheeling about in ever-varying circles, and never once checking its arrowy speed.

Much has been written about the migration of this bird; for my part I can see nothing more wonderful in it, than in the habits of many others, who leave us in Summer and return again at Spring. As to the strong currents of wind that sweep over the ocean, and which some contend it has not the power to stem, I would ask, "May not the swallow soar higher than these currents of air, into upper regions where it is comparatively calm, or where other winds blow that favour its progress?" We know from balloon ascents, and other experiments, to say nothing of the drifting of clouds, that in the upper air the winds often blow from a contrary quarter to that which sweeps the lower earth; to these heights swallows may soar, and wing their way to their

destination, uninterrupted by storms. For the love we bear poetry, we will imagine it to be so, and fancy them winging their



way high above the earth, where all is silent as the grave, a silence only broken by the beating of their wings: high above

the lower earth they float away like a dream, dim, indistinct, between the shooting stars, above the roar of the ocean, for even the voice of the mighty sea reaches them not, though upon them, as upon us, the great eye of God looks down.

The sand-martin makes a hole in some soft sandstone rock, or in a bank, to the depth of an arm's length at times, and that is its nest. The way it goes to work is very curious; it clings to the face of the sand-bank, with its sharp claws, and making a pick of its beak, hammers away at the sand, and sends it down in showers, turning round to its work, and often making a hole as true as if the circle had been marked with a pair of compasses.

When the opening is made, the bird goes to work inside, clinging by its claws to the top of the hole, and shifting its hold as it works round, now with its back downward, then with its feet at the bottom, while its little head keeps up an incessant bobbing, as it picks away with its short sharp beak, only ceasing when it scratches out the sand it has loosened with its feet. The hole is also made to slope upward, so that no rain can lodge therein. A colony of these birds, near a sheet of water, makes the whole spot alive, however lonely it may have appeared before.

In some parts of England, sand-martins are called bank-swallows, nor are they easily distinguished from the common swallows

when on the wing. Woking, in Surrey, is a favourite resort of the sand-martins, and the banks about that neighbourhood swarm with them. Martin, on the river Trent, and all the way down to the old town of Gainsborough, was another of their haunts, and the village is said to have taken its name from the sand-martins that assembled there.

The shrike, or butcher-bird, is migratory, and makes its appearance at Spring; it is a bird that loves to be alone, for two are rarely found together. Strange stories are told of the well-filled larder this bird keeps; for it kills all it can that comes to hand, and what it cannot eat, it hangs up on sharp-pointed thorns, in readiness for future meals. The butcher-bird preys on smaller birds, insects, and even field mice; what it kills is impaled on a thorn, and there torn to pieces with its sharp bill. The small birds raise a cry of alarm on its approach, and sometimes muster courage enough to give it battle, for twenty to one is great odds; and such as the shrike is not always ready to take, though if one out of the assailants happens to come a little nearer than the rest, its beak is buried in the little warrior's brain in a moment, and away he goes to be hung up in the larder, beside some other unfortunate brother bird. Gilbert White says, a friend of his shot a butcher-bird, and that he should not have seen it, had not his attention been attracted by the outcries and chatterings of the smaller birds it was approaching.

The garden-warbler, or fauvette, is rather a scarce bird, visiting us in April, and leaving in August. Its song is very pleasant to hear, beginning with low sweet notes like the swallow, then increasing in loudness, until it rivals the blackbird. It sings nearly all day long, and though often heard, it is but rarely seen, as it hides itself at the sound of approaching footsteps. It is said, the fauvette feeds on the caterpillar of the cabbage-butterfly, an insect which no other bird is supposed to eat.

The throstle is scarcely surpassed by any other bird excepting the nightingale, and pours forth his full wealth of song in every varied form, upheaving his parded breast, and looking out upon the still landscape with bright restless eyes. We hear him singing in the early morning before the round sun has scaled the

hill-tops: he keeps up his roll of music throughout the day, and closes at night without any apparent fatigue: there is no diminution of sound, no feebleness; he seems more like a good instrument, which, after being played upon for hours, sends forth a sweeter sound: he is no weak traveller, who, having gone a long day's journey, drags wearily up the last hill at sunset. You cannot fail to distinguish his voice from among every warbler of the woods; not that his notes are always alike, but there is some regular modulation, or natural sweetness, which, however

varied, "still does his touch the strain prolong;" and you know it is his own, and could not be deceived even if he had hidden himself in the carcase of the owl. I recollect well, that nearly one of the first birds I reared, when a country-boy, was a throstle: he was the pride and delight of the whole neighbourhood; even the neighbours forgave his breaking their slumber so early in the morning for the sweetness of his song. An old fisherman who arose with the break of day, and who resided in the adjoining house, made the opening of his music a clock to

get up by; and he never was deceived in the time but once, and that was one really beautiful moonlight morning, which streamed in brilliant beams through the opening in the window-shutters, and lured the lovely bird into a belief that it was day.

The throstle sometimes builds in hedges, though generally in low trees or bushes; the outside of the nest is built of hay, straw, moss, or straggling weeds, and this is often coated over inside with rotten wood, and then finished with soft manure, and made

so smooth that it is like the inside of a basin. The missel-thrush makes a much neater nest, so far as outer appearance goes, than the throstle; indeed, few of what is called "basket-making birds" excel the missel-thrush in the craft of building. Nothing can exceed the neatness with which it weaves together the materials it uses; it will even weave in and out the thin sprays amid which its nest is reared, thus making the tree itself form a portion of its nest. Of all beautiful nests, my favourite one is that of the goldfinch; there we find all kinds of soft substances, as neatly felted together as a hat-maker felts the materials of which he makes the body of his hat—not a fibre projects; every bit of moss and lichen, wool, feathers, and bark, is worked and blended together, much more neatly and beautifully than we could do it,

with all the aid of our machinery. The nest of a goldfinch is a perfect picture ; and when the yolk is blown out of the eggs, and placed in the nest, and the bird itself neatly stuffed, I know no prettier ornament to place under glass. The wood-pigeon is about one of the most slovenly builders that I know of : you may sometimes see the eggs through the bottom of the nest, so thinly are the few sticks spread which this bird uses, and the nest is at times so flat, that when the wind rocks the trees, they roll out, fall on the ground, and are broken. As for old Maggy, she builds a dome over her nest, generally of sharp thorns or brambles, and it is no easy matter to take out the eggs, guarded with such a prickly barricade.

I have a great love for those little dirty and noisy vagrants, the sparrows, who hide, and build, and breed under the stifling and smoky house-eaves, out of which they come every now and then, as black as the soot they nestle in, to get a mouthful of fresh air, if such a thing is to be had in our close city streets. Wherever man rears his home, there they are; they will have the attic above, as well as the mice the cellar below ; they follow man wheresoever he builds, and will not be said "nay;" perhaps there never was a time when mice and sparrows were not the companions of man. The sparrow takes possession of the corn-rick, helps himself, and bids you catch him if you can. He flies down ; takes his breakfast with the fowls, his dinner with the pigs, and his tea with whatever he pleases, without ever so much as saying, "by your leave." In summer he goes out of town for a bit of a change, if the corn-fields are pretty handy, nor is he at all particular about the grain being ripe : if the fields are too far off for him, he seems quite content, and lives in his houses, for he considers a whole street his own. In vain does the farmer set a prize upon his head ; for if he dies, he knows he leaves a large family of little hungry sparrows behind him, and that they will eat until they will almost burst, out of revenge for his death.

The sparrows, like the rooks, have their laws, and punish offenders, as soon as the culprit, who has committed himself, is discovered ; they kick up such a "shindy," that the row is heard

all over the neighbourhood ; it begins in a moment, and they all clamour and screech together, loud enough almost to deafen the hearer. But having "blowed up," and beaten the offender, they seem to treat him just as kindly as they did before. They do not seem to bear any malice ; they are what the country-people call "a bit hasty," but it is soon over with them.

House-sparrows, however, do not always confine themselves to building among houses, for there is more than one instance on record, that where they have been annoyed and persecuted, they

have gone away and built in the first trees they came to ; but the least said about their nests the better—such scare-crows were never stuck in trees before—there was neither "make nor shape in 'em," as an old farmer said, whose thatch they had before-time, to use his own words, "torn out by double fist-fulls."

While mentioning the justice dealt out to delinquents by sparrows, I must not omit the hooded-crows, who build and live

together in pairs, like the carrion-crows. These birds hold at times, what may justly be called, a "crow-court;" they are described by those who have closely watched their habits, as delaying the trial for two or three days, until a sufficient number of crows arrive to form a court; the prisoners to be tried meantime, are not permitted to escape. There is no doubt but that the birds which are to be tried, are brought up by what may be called the "crow-police." When the court assembles, there is a loud croaking, which sometimes lasts for several minutes, and all the crows seem as if clamouring together. When this sound has ceased, which seems to be their mode of arguing the matter, the whole court rises like one crow, and begins to peck and beat the prisoners to death. Sometimes three or four victims are found dead, after the assembly of hooded-crows has dispersed. Nor do these strange meetings ever take place without such executions. When the trial is over the crows disperse in solitary pairs, and are never known to muster again in numbers, until another court-day. I do not agree with our favourite moral poet, where he says,—

"birds are not able
To converse, except in fable."

What boy has not loitered on his way to some country school, and tried to catch a glimpse of the cuckoo, while he imitated its voice. Even grey-headed old men, almost deaf and bent with age, will raise their trembling hands to their dull ears, and round their fingers to make an ear-trumpet to catch the sound, while the superstitious old grandmother thrusts her hand into her huge patched pocket to touch her money—for that is reckoned lucky—when she first catches the sound of the cuckoo's song; and far be it from us to stir a leaf in the dim grove whose twilight is haunted by these hoary superstitions.

Yet this bird, so beloved, will lay its eggs in any bird's nest, leave them to be hatched by a stranger, and the young to take their chance, and make the best shift they can.

Our artist has depicted a poor little sparrow, who, in addition to her usual hungry family, has had the ill-luck to be saddled with one of these gormandising foundlings. The worm in its

little beak would not make more than the tenth of a meal for the great gaping intruder. Some say that it sucks the eggs of

little birds, but this I doubt. In allusion to the migrating habits of this bird, which never goes where Winter reigns, Logan says—

"Sweet bird! thy bower is ever green,
Thy sky is ever clear;
Thou hast no sorrow in thy song,
No Winter in thy year."

I too have heard the Cuckoo in those grave moments when the heart is full, and exclaimed—

Too well I know that note;
Those summer sounds the old years backward bring,
And set the locked-up thoughts once more afloat;
They carry me away to life's glad spring,
To home with all its old boughs murmuring.

I had a great love for the song of the Cuckoo in my boyish days, and yet I hardly know why now. I have hunted about the trees in the lanes and hedgerows for hours, to obtain a sight of this bird, looking—

"a thousand ways
In bush, and tree, and sky;"

hearing it at one moment near at hand, then the next minute it seemed to sound afar off, as if coming across the river, while all the wide valley rang with its music,—or, pleasanter than all, I loved to sit in some woodland solitude, listening to the cuckoo's song, and the mournful cooing of the ring-dove, which seemed to make the whole place—

"Stiller by the sound."

Rooks may now be seen everywhere—in the fields, and by the sides of hedges, busy foraging; and often in the early morning, before it is day, they are up, and in quest of dew-worms, which are their principal food. It is after the rains of February, and at the beginning of Spring, that they pick up a good supply of worms and other grubs which have been drowned. You see them close upon the heels of the ploughman; they follow the footsteps of the sower, as, with his "hopper" before him, he moves along with that regular, measured swing, which aids him in scattering in the seed so regularly. But the time of their great feast is during the season that the cockchafer is abroad: you may then hear their hollow husky voices ringing through the woods where they are feeding. They also pull up several plants which are injurious to our pastures, and obtain the larvæ of many kinds of insects that feed at the roots. I have watched these birds for hours: their airy city is a town in miniature, filled with mechanics, blackguards, and idle bird-gentlemen.

Like many other social communities, they are made up of good and bad, and, in spite of a tolerably vigilant police, are

not free from the depredations of their own light-fingered gentry, who do not hesitate to carry away the whole of a neighbour's house when his back is turned; or sometimes, instead of removing it, they take possession, and although generally turned out in the end, they have been seen to maintain their ground with a spirit worthy of a better cause. Sometimes a young married couple, having laid a good solid foundation for their future home, return with a couple of rafters in their beaks, which, after a careful survey, they have borne over hill and valley, with weary wings, an immense distance; when, lo! instead of finding the half-finished house as they left it, the very foundation is gone, and nothing but the naked fork of the branch on which it was laid remains. Well may they bob their heads, and caw to one another, and wonder what impudent thieves have been so busy during their absence. They set out on the search, and find on the next tree every stick and stake twisted into another nest, on which one of the plunderers is resting, while the other robber, a down-looking dark-faced rascal, is perched on the branch beside his companion. After exchanging a word or two of a sort on each side, the battle commences: the whole neighbourhood is alarmed; the police interfere; and after being beaten, the culprits are driven out—transported to some solitary tree—and not allowed, during that season, to return to the rookery.

Your rooks are not a proud people, who refuse to mingle with strangers, for they will frequently allow the noisy jackdaws to build beside them, and are not above dining with the starlings in winter, so long as they conduct themselves respectfully. Every one who has rambled out in spring or summer, must have noticed the hundreds of small caterpillars which are often seen suspended by their own threads from the trees, especially the oak, the beautiful foliage of which they soon destroy. Here the rooks find a rich repast; and instead of waiting until the insects have spun their way to the ground, these birds alight upon the trees, and, fluttering their great black wings, send down the caterpillars in thousands, and having strewed the greensward with a plentiful banquet, the rooks then descend and eat their fill.

Sometimes they quarrel in their nests, falling out, as Washington Irving expresses it, "for a share of the blanket." Then their little ones, a poor callow naked brood, are pitched from their high

tenements by the first wind, and dashed to atoms, unless they happen to extend one of their skinny hands to seize upon some branch in descending. But they love society, if it only be to quarrel with each other. And then their stately walk in a

ploughed field: how leisurely they lift up one leg after the other, like a gentleman in silk stockings in bad weather who has a horror of being splashed! What long conversations they sometimes hold, particularly after supper, standing upon the edge of their nests, like gossiping neighbours, each beside his door, and talking over the events of the day! nodding and bowing, and giving the good-night to each other; then sinking upon their pillows,

> "And, eased the putting off
> These troublesome disguises which we wear,
> Straight side by side are laid."

Carrion crows, which begin to build early in Spring, do not at all resemble the social rooks in their habits; they are regular pirates, ever keeping a sharp look-out from the mast-heads of their tall tree-tops, and ready in a moment to hoist sail with their great black wings, and give chase to whatever heaves in sight. Let even a hawk attempt to board them, and they will fight to the death; and so high were their pugnacious powers estimated, when cock-fighting was a fashionable amusement, and ranked amongst the first of rural sports, that the eggs of hens which had been bred up with celebrated game cocks, were placed in the nests of carrion crows to be hatched, under the belief that those sat upon by these marauders, produced the best fighting-cocks. The carrion crow is a gross feeder, and will gorge himself, like a vulture, on any kind of decayed animal matter. The eggs are large and long, beautifully green, and dashed over with strange, sharp, dark-looking spots; nor were the eggs easily taken, for "Old Carry," as we used to call him in my bird-nesting days, would hover round, and make a dashing defence for the eggs or young birds, and more than one boy has come down with a bleeding hand, through their pecking at it when thrust into the nest. The bill is bent a little, like that of the hawk, and there are a few hair-like feathers growing about the thick end of the beak; and excepting for these marks, and their being a little larger,—distinctions only to be made when very near,—it is difficult to tell them from the rooks. The surest sign is, you will rarely see more than two carrion crows

together, while the rooks sometimes blacken a whole field. I cannot say whether it be true or not, but I have heard old countrymen say, you never find one carrion crow's nest nearer than half a mile to another's ; that if one began to build within that limit of the other's nest, they would fight every hour of the day, until one drove the other further away.

But leaving rooks and carrion crows, we will now glance at a few of the "pretty birds" that begin to be busy in the early Spring. Amongst these is the wryneck, a beautifully marked bird, which may be seen in breezy March, foraging for food amongst the ant-hills, but starting off the moment it perceives any one approaching, and concealing itself in the bottom of the nearest hedge or ditch until they have passed. You know it at the first glance, for it is always twisting its little neck about, and never seems at rest. It procures its food by thrusting its long glutinous tongue into ant-hills, and to this the insects instantly adhere, and are easily and greedily swallowed. The little willow-wren, hay-bird, or ground-wren, as it is called in different parts of England, also makes its appearance about this period. It builds a domed nest, leaving a small opening at the top by which to enter. It lays from six to seven small white eggs, spotted with dusky pink at the larger end. This beautiful nest is composed of moss and dried grass, wearing outwardly a neat oval shape, while the inside is carefully lined with the softest feathers. It generally builds in the hole of a bank, or at the foot of a tree or bush, often under the hollow roots, and sometimes, though we believe very rarely, its nest is found in a low bush. Chaffinches, which remain with us all the year, may now be seen in the fields where the sower has cast his seed. In sheep-walks and dry uplands the stone-curlew is busily engaged looking for insects and worms: this bird builds no nest, but lays its two light brown-coloured and blotchy eggs upon the bare ground, generally in fields that abound with stones, or grey mossy flints, which, bearing a close resemblance in colour to its young ones, are of great use in protecting them from danger.

The little flycatcher (which is the last summer bird that makes its appearance) is now seen peeping from among the vine-leaves

that spread along the walls, or hiding its tiny form in the sweet-briar. Except the robin, there is no bird more familiar than this: for it will venture to build near a doorway through which people are constantly passing, or upon a branch within a few inches of the chamber-window, and will not forsake its nest until just within reach of the hand. I knew one so tame (which built in a vine-tree that ran up the front of a cottage) as to suffer itself to be touched when sitting on its nest. It is not a song-bird, but makes a low wailing noise when in danger. In some places it is held as sacred as the robin. It devours many insects which if left would destroy the grapes. There is an old saying in the country, that—

> "If you scare the fly-catcher away,
> No good luck will with you stay."

Doubtless, the old ballad of "The Babes in the Wood" has saved the lives and nests of many a robin: for the old legend says,—

> "Little robins and jenny-wrens
> Are God Almighty's cocks and hens;"

and I knew a boy so much affected by this superstition as to return nearly two miles after it was dark with a nest of young robins, which he had mistaken for larks. He replaced them; and the next morning I started the old bird from the nest. It is a wrong notion to suppose that if the young or eggs of a bird are disturbed they will for ever forsake their nests. I have taken away the eggs, and left a small stone or two in their places, and they have still continued to *lay*, especially hedge-sparrows and *pinks*—for so we called the chaffinch, from its chirping. The blackbird and throstle are not so easily deceived.

I have shown how the sand-martin makes, like a miner, a pickaxe of his beak, and hews out a house in the banks and soft sand-rocks, as the ancient Britons did, long before Cæsar set his foot on our island shore. But there are other birds, too numerous to mention, excepting in a work devoted wholly to Natural History, that mix up a cement and plaster it on their nests; while some, like hatters—when hats were made as they

ought to be—felt, and press together the materials they build with, until they become as solid as the best broad-cloth that was ever worn. Others, again, measure their materials before they put them together, break this off here, and bend that in there; fitting, and squaring, and cutting, like carpenters or joiners. But the basket-making birds are the most curious of all; for they will bend the most brittle and rotten sticks and twigs together, which, if we were only to touch them ever so gently, we should powder or break into hundreds of bits. I have already pointed out the missel-thrush as the neatest worker among all basket-making birds. No doubt birds built in the

Garden of Eden as they still do in the present day—that they are the oldest architects and builders on earth; and whoever looks narrowly into their works will see that man is indebted to them for many a hint, and that in their plans may be traced the grand outline of many an art, which man has only improved and enlarged upon. They are the original masons and miners, who hew their way into rocks, and make their homes in caverns, burrow in embankments, and in every way seem equal to all we know of the habits of the early inhabitants of the earth. In them we find the early carpenters, who saw, and make joints, rear up rafters and beams, and throw over all a vaulted roof. They are the primitive plasterers, who mix up cement, and spread it out smoothly over the rough work they have prepared

to receive it; giving to the whole a level, hard, and even surface, which the builder of a palace can scarcely excel. The hatter and the clothier but felts and weaves after their example. The basket-maker only twines into new forms the smoother and longer osiers which he avails himself of; for the brittle materials which they cross and intertwine together would become a sightless and useless mass in his hands. Hurdis, a country parson, who lived at Bishopstone, in Sussex, above half a century ago, where he had his own press, and wrote and printed most of his truly beautiful poems, has, in his "Village Curate," left us the following exquisite passage on the building of birds:—

> "Mark it well, within, without;
> No tool had he that wrought; no knife to cut,
> No nail to fix, no bodkin to insert;
> No glue to join; his little beak was all,
> And yet how neatly finished! What nice hand,
> With every implement and means of art,
> And twenty years' apprenticeship to boot,
> Could make me such another?"

To walk out among the farms and villages, and watch the habits of these "little nuns," that haunt our old cathedral-like forests, is one among the many delights which come with the return of Spring—the season which of all others seems to bring with it the greatest pleasure. From the desolate and barren boundary-line of Winter, Spring advances, starting up from a bed of snow, and cold, and darkness. Summer has but to awaken, and she finds herself in a land already covered with flowers, and overhung with green leaves. Her coming startles us not; she seems to approach almost noiselessly. Nor is the rustling Autumn makes among the leaves more audible. It is Spring, that, from the cold grey granite of a primæval-looking world, starts up, and begins to clothe the naked waste with verdure, that arrests both eye and ear; and somehow we seem to love her better than any of the other Seasons, for we know through what a dreary and perilous waste she has travelled—that night and day she was journeying on alone, when the snow was beating in her fair face, and the cold winds blowing upon

ıe pale snowdrops which she held in her hand as she came ong :—

"Before the red-cock crowed from the farm upon the hill,
When we were warm asleep, and all the world was still."

The starling is another of our early builders, and the following anecdote, related by the Rev. Mr. Sladen, in the "Zoologist," is a strong proof of the reason, or instinct, which this bird possesses:—He states that one built under the eaves of a roof in the basin of a drain-pipe, and that the young, in their eagerness to obtain food, fell out of the nest. One was killed; the remaining two he picked up, and placed in a basket covered with netting, which he hung up near to the nest. The next morning one of these disappeared—the last one he carefully watched, and saw the old bird approach it with food; but, instead of feeding the little prisoner, she tempted it, by hunger; the sight of the food, and its attempts to reach her, by struggling, and forcing its way through the netting prevailed, when it fell to the ground unhurt. She then enticed it into a corner of the shrubbery, to the very spot where she had also concealed the other young one, which had before been missed.

The willow-wren, which frequently builds in osier-beds, is elegantly marked with yellow, brown, and white; it also sings longer than most of our song-birds, for its cheering chirrup may often be heard as late as September.

"The nest of a bird," says Mr. Crouch, "is so interesting an object, so curiously and admirably contrived for an evident pur-

pose, of materials apparently so little calculated for the formation of such a structure, and its form and position are so varied according to the aptitude for comfort of its inhabitants, combined with security from discovery and danger, that it has ever been contemplated as a surprising manifestation of skill and intelligence in the little beings engaged in its fabrication."

> "Some to the holly hedge
> Nestling repair, and to the thicket some;
> Some to the rude protection of the thorn
> Commit their feeble offspring."—THOMSON.

Even as late as the close of May the flowers of Spring have not all faded, and many that Summer will weave into her gaudy garland are beginning to bloom: then we have the cuckoo still calling to us by day, and the lute-tongued nightingale sending her gushing music through the silence of the night, while

> "Her clear voice makes a loud rioting,
> Echoing through all the greenwood wide."

And you wander on, as the same poet expresses it,

> "Till to a lawn you come, all white and green,
> You in so fair a lawn have never been.
> The ground is green with daisy powder'd over;
> Tall are the flowers—the grove a lofty cover:
> All green and white; and nothing else is seen."
>
> CHAUCER'S *Cuckoo and Nightingale.*

But we will leave off bird-nesting, and wander away somewhere in the evening twilight, while the dew is falling like rounded pearls, and the fragrance still exists which the folded flowers threw out before they closed their bells.

"Tirra-lirra, tirra-lirra, jug, jug, jug!" List! that is the song of the nightingale. How delightful to wander forth this sweet spring evening, and listen to that enchanting lay, while the star of eve is planted like a gem upon the forehead of the sky. Although we can scarcely see what flowers are at our feet, or distinguish the May-buds—from which such a rich aroma arises—from the leaves, we know that the tawny head of the little chorister is somewhere at hand, "in shadiest covert hid," and will never wander far from the spot, unless captured, until the

summer flowers begin to fade. It is believed that the nightingale sings sweetest in the neighbourhood where the spotted cowslips grow; and that never, until the time of his departure arrives, can he be allured from so sweet a spot. What rapid notes! How his music gushes forth, like a stream that is eager to empty itself! He sings as if Spring were far too short for him to reach the end of his song; as if, even with all his hurry, he should not have half time enough to say all that he intended, although he came before the pearl-flushed blossoms of the hawthorn had opened. See where the bright round moon heaves up above the

distant bridge! Oh, who would not leave the glitter and glare of the crowded city for such a scene as this? Saving for the song of the nightingale, how still the whole landscape seems; between the pauses that he makes to regain his breath, we can hear the lapping and rippling of the river; not a branch waves without the rustling sound becoming audible; and far off we catch the melancholy booming of the bittern—that strange, sad, and solitary sound, which, when heard at midnight, in the midst of lonely and desolate marshes, causes the stoutest heart for a moment to quail.

It is now the general opinion among naturalists, that the male nightingale appears nearly a month before the female in England,

and that his song is sweeter and louder as her arrival draws nearer; that he selects one particular spot, and never wanders far from it, and to that spot the female will come; and that to attract her attention is supposed to be the reason why he sings so loudly when her time of coming arrives. One nightingale will answer another beyond the reach of human hearing: this has been proved by stop watches; the two listeners—above a mile apart—and a nightingale singing at each end of that distance, having marked the time when each bird began and ended.

The woods now ring with the loud chattering of the jay, and the solemn tapping of the woodpecker; while the furze bushes are all alive with flocks of linnets; and where the heath is broom-covered, or the clover in flower, there are the bees, making a drowsy murmuring, as if singing bass in the great hymn of Nature.

How delightful it is to wander away, like Solomon of old, who must have been a great lover of the country, "into the fields, or to lodge in the villages, to see the fruits of the valley, and to go forth into the gardens to gather lilies." What country colours the wise king uses in this beautiful passage! The green of the fields, the grey look of the villages, the rich flush of fruits and flowers,—not expressed fully, but thrown in among other tints, which flash over the whole of his exquisite song.

What a bleating is there now among the sheep—what races between the little lambs! And then the aroma we inhale, while walking through a woodland, where the tender leaves of the hazel overhang the path, and the whole underwood steams like a perfumed censer; where the banks are "painted with delight," blue and gold and green, striped with wild hyacinths, celandine, and primroses, and the tender green of young leaves. We saunter along grassy roads that lead to nowhere, past little plashes of water, which seem only made for beautiful aquatic plants to grow in, and great-eyed dragon-flies to play over and look at the gauze of their elegant wings. Little pools, which Nature hollowed out for the wild wood-birds to drink from, where they wash and preen themselves, and make mirrors of the silver surface, in which they look at their own beauty;

where the harmless leaf-eating water-rat swims round the dropping branch, tasting a morsel of the foliage now and then, whenever he sees a bit that suits his dainty taste, while the water-hen sits beside him unheeded. That is the spot for a lover of the country to sit down in and listen to the Birds in Spring.

ANGLING IN SPRING.

IZAAK WALTON — RIVER-SIDE SCENERY — PLEASURES OF ANGLING — FISHES — OLD WORKS ON ANGLING — OTTERS AND WATER-SHREWS.

ANGLING is another of the out-of-door enjoyments which comes with the return of Spring. The fishing-rods are once again drawn from their hiding-places, the old tackle hunted up, and away to the pleasant banks of the rivers. It is not the mere hooking of fish that brings delight, although we may try to deceive ourselves with this notion; but the quiet scenery is the great charm. The free wind beating upon the cheek, the glad waters sparkling and singing in the sunshine, the shade of trees, the song of birds, and budding beauties of Nature, after the long winter, are the real sources of enjoyment. How pleasant to sit on a flowery bank to fish, or wander into the adjoining meadow to watch the actions of the birds, and to gaze upon the outstretched landscape—to see the arched sky, and hear the distant

whistle of the labourer in the fields, and, above all, to have a good book in your pocket! There are but few anglers who do not love poetry—they live in the midst of it, and if they have ever read Izaak Walton they must love poetry for his sake. How sweetly does he allure us from our homes into the flowery fields by his winning words!—promising to lead us to some honest alehouse before we begin, where we shall find a cleanly room, lavender in the windows, and twenty ballads stuck upon the wall; where the hostess is both cleanly, handsome, and civil, and can dress a fish and make it good meat. And if you choose to stay all night, she has two beds, and you may have the best; and the linen looks white, and smells of lavender, and you long to lie in a pair of sheets that smell so sweet; and before going to rest you can tell tales, or sing ballads, or make a catch, or find some harmless sport to content you, and pass away a little time without offence to God or man.

"And now," says honest Izaak, "I think it will be time to repair to our angle-rods, which we left in the water to fish for themselves; and let me tell you that this kind of fishing is like putting money to use. No life is so happy and so pleasant as the life of a well-governed angler; for when the lawyer is swallowed up with business, and the statesman is preventing or contriving plots, then we sit on cowslip banks, hear the birds sing, and possess ourselves in as much quietness as these silent silver streams which we now see glide so smoothly by us. Indeed we may say of angling as Dr. Boteler said of strawberries, 'Doubtless God could have made a better berry, but doubtless God never did.' And so, if I might judge, God never did make a more calm, quiet, innocent recreation than angling."

Then the "old man eloquent" tells us, when last he sat upon that primrose bank and gazed over those meadows, he thought "they were too pleasant to be looked at but only on holidays." Warming with the subject, he exclaims, "What would a blind man give to see the pleasant meadows and flowers we have met with?"

Here, then, is the poetry of angling,—in the quiet enjoyment of beautiful scenery, and the delightful repose it brings

to a contemplative mind. The most pleasing passages in good old Izaak's work are those in which he leaves his rod to

angle for itself, throws himself down under the shadow of a tree on the grass, and converses of what he sees around him. There

was a good and gentle spirit in the dear old man, a soul at peace with itself, a mind ever at ease; and these form the very life-breath of his pages, and make them ever fresh and young. How the old man seems present with us, when he tells his companion to hide his bottle of ale under the sycamore-tree, and that, after they have angled awhile, they will there sit down, and "make a brave breakfast with a piece of powdered beef, and a radish or two, that he has in his bag,—a good, honest, wholesome, hungry breakfast." Then the thrift of the old man is beautifully and simply pourtrayed; he will part with no money, but "get a draught of red-cow's milk, by giving pretty Maudlin and her honest mother a brace of trouts for their supper;" and they, in return for the fish, "will give him a good syllabub of new verjuice"—what dish was that? we now ask and wonder!—"then we can sit down in a new haycock and eat it, while Maudlin sings of the hunting in Chevy Chase." Good old Izaak finishes by promising his companion a treat—a dainty dish of "minnows, fried with yolks of eggs, the flowers of cowslips, primroses, and a little tansy."

Then they shelter, while a shower of rain falls, watching the drops from the leaves dotting the stream; or perchance the rainbow appeared, and the old angler would repeat those beautiful lines on the rainbow, which were at that time well known, written by Henry Vaughan, beginning with

> "Still young and fine! but what is still in view
> We slight as old and soiled, though fresh and new;
> How bright wert thou, when Shem's admiring eye
> Thy burning flaming arch did first descry;
> When Zerah, Nahor, Haran, Abram, Lot,
> The youthful world's grey fathers, in one knot
> Did, with intentive looks, watch every hour
> For thy new light, and trembled at each shower."

Up and away then to the breezy river-sides, where the tall green willows are ever swaying to and fro, and the cool shadows of the trees quiver and twinkle in the water; while the sunshine streams through the network of expanding leaves, and chequers the ripples below with ever-shifting shuttles of purple and gold. Far out, beyond the boiling eddies, may be heard the fish rising

at the flies, then falling with a deep, solemn plunge, which startles the silence that reigns over that quiet river-side scenery, and forms circles upon the water, that lengthen and expand, until the foremost ring breaks upon the river-shore, which every

succeeding ripple just touches, and is seen no more. What numbers of calm nooks, that lay like little mirrors between the curvings and indentings of the embankments, may now be found; some at the corners of jetties, or on the little table-land with its solitary tree, which, but for its narrow neck fieldward, would be an island, and by the deep, precipitous sides of which the largest of the finny tribe love to shelter. Dark, cloudy pools, which the perch, the carp, and the roach frequent; haunts of the chub and barbel, and broadsided bream, whose very names call up pictures of bridges, and mill-pools, and sluices, and grey old flood-gates opening under gloomy arches, where the long-

jawed and strong-bodied pike loves to lie in wait for its prey. Of all out-of-door sports, angling is the pleasantest: if weary, there is the pleasant bank to sit down upon; the clear river to look over; the fresh breeze ever blowing about one's face; the arrowy flight of the water-loving swallow to watch; in short, all the lazy luxuries to be found together, that throw such a charm around open-air amusements. Fly-fishing, it is true, leaves the angler but little time to dream; but where the old-fashioned, well-weighted float stood perpendicular, for nearly the whole hour together—where no bite came to drag it down, nor any

current to carry it away, but still calm and motionless it stood, excepting when the breeze just stirred the slender line—there was nothing left but to gaze upon the sunny sky, the calm water, and the outstretched landscape; to think of Izaak Walton, the milkmaid, and the shelter under the honeysuckle hedge while it rained. No other amusement left, while fishing in such a spot, but to call before the eye the image of that happy-hearted old angler, or to hum a verse of that joyous old song which he composed, entitled "The Angler's Wish," beginning with—

> "I in these flowery meads would be,
> These crystal streams should solace me;
> To whose harmonious bubbling noise,
> I with my angle would rejoice."

Although an angler from my boyhood, I never excelled in the "gentle craft," but loved better to let my rod lay idly among the sedge and flowers, or to watch my float riding lazily on the ripples, while listening to the whispering of the leaves above and the reeds below, or seeing the waves break one after another upon the sunny shore, dreaming with half-closed eyes, and seeming to see nothing, yet drinking in the whole in never-to-be-forgotten draughts of delight.

If we begin to talk about fishes, and commence with the stickleback, it is still impossible to get rid wholly of Izaak Walton, who must have written with a quiet smile playing about his honest mouth when he said, "I know not where he dwells in winter, nor what he is good for in summer." The stickleback, however, is a great addition to a glass globe; his colours are splendid, and those three spines, which he can raise or lower at will, are very curious; by changing his water daily, he will live in his glass-house for two or three years. The minnow, which first appears in March, although so small, has a flavour equal to many of our more celebrated fish, especially when fried with the flowers of primroses and cowslips, and the yolks of eggs and butter—a dish delicate enough for the most imaginative of poets, though it was at one time very common. In summer they are full of spawn, and not so good as in spring. Everybody knows

that a small red worm is a sufficient bait, that three or four hooks may be used at once, and sometimes as many fish be drawn out at a time, for they always bite eagerly.

The bull-head, or miller's-thumb, with its immense head, large mouth, and spiny teeth, though anything but pleasant to look upon, forms an excellent dish; and those who have never tasted it will be agreeably surprised when they partake of it, and regret that they are not to be met with oftener at the fishmonger's. He is very fond of hiding under a stone, beside which, if a worm be dropped down gently, he will dart upon it in an instant, for he never stops to consider a moment about the matter if the hook is well concealed. The loach we have often caught in the river Trent; it is a long fish, without either scales or teeth, bearded like a barbel. It is often used as a bait, especially for eels. Next in succession comes the gudgeon, which, though "little, is good;" it is well known to the London angler, being plentiful in the Lea river—that river of old historical associations, where English Alfred drew off the water and left the fleet of Hastings, the celebrated sea-king, high and dry aground. It is rather a handsome-looking fish, broad in the middle, with a beautifully marked tail and back fin, and may be caught either with worm, gentle, or paste. The bait must touch the ground. It is fond of a gravelly situation. The bleak, or whiting, is a well-known fish, always on the move; is about six inches long, with large eyes, a small head, and silvery gills: the back is of a beautiful green colour. They are famous fly-catchers, and, from their rapid motions, are called water-swallows. Two or three hooks may be used, as in minnow fishing, and the same baits as for gudgeons. The flavour is very indifferent.

The dace, dart, shallow, dare, or by whatever name it is called, is a fast breeder, and during the summer months very partial to playing about on the sunny surface of the water. It is found in many of our rivers, and appears to prefer such spots as are in constant motion, through the rolling of rapid currents and eddies. In cold weather it prefers a quiet hole, or the sheltered part of a stream overhung by the tall water-flags or tufted rushes. Its body is rather long, the back of palish green, varied

with dusky marks, while the belly has a silvery appearance, and the fins a pale red tinge. It will almost take any bait in spring; neither worms, larvæ of beetles, grubs, caterpillars, or even water-snails, come amiss to it. They are sharp quick biters, requiring to be struck suddenly; and, as they are not to be drawn out without a good struggle, it is necessary to use strong tackle. Blaine makes mention of a pie made of dace and roach, which seems to have been

> "A dainty dish to set before a king;
> For when the pie was open the guests began to sing."

And, according to his account, they would willingly have dined off such a pie once a week, at least, as long as they lived. Roach-fishing so nearly resembles that of dace that we shall not pause to describe it. The beautiful gold-coloured circle of the eye and the rich red fins are familiar to those who have seen the roach in good condition; nor is it to be mistaken, on account of its great breadth when laid on its side. It affords excellent sport to the angler, and has been caught from a pound to two, or more, in weight. We pass by the rudd—a fish which has led to much discussion, some considering it a species of dace, others of carp—and come to the bream, with its high arched back, forked tail, and large eyes. When in fine condition and a good size, the bream has a rich golden colour, in place of the silvery hue it before wore. They are a cautious race, and the angler ought not to throw his shadow upon the water, but keep himself as much out of sight as possible. A warm, cloudy day is considered the most favourable for biting, and a red worm the best of baits. He is a fish rather too fond of sucking the bait, but this can be easily detected by watching the float: for our part, we never struck in too great a hurry when we detected this half-nibbling; the better plan, we think, is to let him get well hold, or go if he chooses, though it is necessary to examine the bait after his departure. Very few works contain so much dry humour as some of our old books on angling, and you cannot at times refrain from laughing outright while perusing what they intended to be read most seriously. I was once the possessor of a

goodly collection of these quaint treatises. Some of these good old men had certain short prayers which they offered up before they began fishing, when they had a "bite," and when they began to haul in their finny treasures. In one of these old books the fisherman is advised "to be full of humble thoughts, and when occasion offers, to kneel, lie down, or wet his feet and hands, as often as there is any advantage to be gained thereby:" nor is he to mind "a little dirty water or mud," if he can get anything out of it. He is also advised to render himself skilful in music, so that whenever his spirits are melancholy, or his thoughts heavy, "he may remove the same with some godly hymn or anthem, of which David gives many examples." Again, he is to be strong and valiant, not to be amazed at storms, nor frightened at thunder. Nor must he, "like the fox which preyeth upon the lambs, employ all his labour and cunning on the smaller fry, but, like the lion that seizeth elephants, think the greatest fish that swims a reward little enough for the pains he endures." He must also "be patient; not feel vexed when he loses his prey, although it is almost in his hand." Neither must he swear: and we still retain the old saying, "those who swear will catch no fish;" besides it would hardly have been the thing to have ripped out a thundering oath after having chanted some "godly hymn or anthem." The angler also ought to be "a scholar and a good grammarian," as, no doubt, the fish, being an ancient people and from the earliest ages acquainted with respectable society, must have felt bad grammar grate again upon their ruddy gills. Further, he must have sweetness of speech, to entice others to follow his art; have also a knowledge of the sun, moon, and stars; be conversant with wind and weather; and have a constant and settled belief that where "the waters are pleasant and anything likely, there the Creator of all good things hath stored up much of his plenty." How religiously did these old rascals set about a little quiet murder! thanking Heaven when they succeeded, and, as Cromwell said, "had good execution."

From early spring until the close of autumn, perch angling is pursued; they are very fond of lingering in shadowy places, as

bridges, old mill-dams and flood-gates, and such like quiet spots, where they readily take the bait. The perch is a beautifully-

marked fish; the back and a portion of the sides are of dark green, varied with black, while the belly is white and red. In

form it is deep, arched, and has a large mouth, with rich golden irides. It will bite greedily at a worm.

As there are so many kinds of trout, I must confine myself to the common one, which is generally from twelve to fifteen inches in length, is of a dirty yellow colour, brownish on the back, and spotted. Early in spring the trout will take a ground bait, for which nothing can be better than a worm. Fly-fishing would occupy the whole space we have devoted to the description of Angling, so we must pass it by. Remember, in fishing for trout, to keep out of sight; once throw your shadow upon the water, and away the shy visitor goes. As soon as you have landed a trout, kill it—a sharp blow on the head is pretty sure to finish it; and this is better than leaving it to pant on the grass, or gasp in your fishing basket, to say nothing of the richness added to its flavour. The grayling is fond of clear, rapid streams, especially such as flow through hilly countries. It is rather less than the trout, beautifully formed; the head small; the eyes prominent, and circled with silver; the teeth very small; the head a dusky colour, and the gills a bright green, which in time become dark. The back is of a greenish blue tinge; the sides of the richest silvery grey, though when first caught glittering in the sunlight like gold, and almost gaudy, through the rich dark irregular spots which dot the shifting silver. It is a rapid swimmer, and is lost to the eye in a moment. When full-grown, it is about fifteen or sixteen inches in length; and although taken all the year round, is not considered in season until September, and from then to February or the middle of Spring. At the latter season they will take almost any bait used in bottom fishing, such as worms, gentles, grubs; nor are they at all particular, if they have had a narrow escape from the hook, of attacking the bait again, even with a torn jaw. The tackle ought to be fine. The flesh is very white, and the flavour highly prized.

Walton, in his beautiful poem entitled "The Angler's Wish," says he loved

> "To see sweet dew-drops kiss the flowers,
> Then be washed off by April showers."

Many strange objects come across the angler's eye while standing silently in the river-side solitudes. Sometimes he catches a glimpse of the otter in pursuit of its prey, now stemming the rapid current, and breaking the foam-bells amid the eddies, as it swims to and fro, then darting down in the direction of the stream with the rapidity of an arrow, or again disappearing in the twinkling of an eye, and, ere one can number twenty, rising up at an immense distance from the spot where it went down, and bearing a large fish in its jaws, as it cleaves its way towards the shore; when, beginning at the head, it quickly eats its way down to the tail of the fish, until the whole is devoured. The attitude of the otter in water is really beautiful; its short legs and web-footed feet, its long flattened body and broad tail by which it can steer itself in any direction it pleases in a moment, together with its broad flat head, are all admirably adapted for swimming, and enable it to turn aside and float as rapidly under the water as when on the surface—frequently, while under the river, it will drive a shoal of fish towards the shore, narrowing the circle every time it swims round them, until, finding they cannot escape, they throw themselves out of the water and become an easy prey to their pursuer. Sometimes, beside a quiet stream, you come unaware upon the little water-shrew, as it oars itself gently along, its black glossy back shining like velvet, looking, after it has dived for a moment, as if it was covered all over with beautiful white pearls, then in an instant as smooth, and dry, and glittering, as if its silken coat had never touched the stream. When alarmed, it either rushes into its little nest or plunges to the bottom of the water for safety, although, if you watch narrowly, it will not be long before you see its little sharp snout and long whiskers peeping out above the surface; for it is compelled to reappear quickly, and draw in a fresh supply of air. In beautiful contrast to its deep glossy back, its under parts are of the cleanest and clearest white; and while it swims, its smooth silky sides seem to broaden out, and its tail to shift suddenly as it turns about in its rapid motions in pursuit of the insects that feed upon the aquatic plants, so that it is almost impossible for

the eye to catch the rapid changes of its tiny rudder-like tail, as it amuses itself by swimming round and round the floating leaves that are suspended from the drooping spray. The dancing motion of the foliage caused by the rippling of the eddies, and the elegant attitude of the little swimmer, as it is borne away a moment by the current, then makes head against it in an instant, then keeps gliding in and out between the leaves of the drooping branch, form as pleasing a picture as an angler or patiently-watching naturalist would wish to alight upon.

TREES IN SPRING.

BEAUTY OF TREES IN SPRING—ELDER—ELM—BIRCH—BEECH, ETC.—TREES IN BLOSSOM—GRANDEUR OF FOREST SCENERY—MAY-BUDS.

SPRING is the handmaiden of Summer: she comes first, and dots the trees and hedges with green delicate buds, as if she marked the spots for Summer to hang out her long green leaves. The laburnums are Spring's foresters, and wear her livery of green and gold; the fruit-trees of the orchards her maidens, whom she clothes in red and white, looping up their garments with beautiful blossoms; while the chesnuts throw out green fan-like leaves to hide their deepening blushes.

There is a pleasure in watching the young buds shoot out at this season of the year. You perceive a growing greenness, an increasing flush on the trees and hedges, after a night's rain, which tells you that they have awoke from

their slumber, shaken off their Winter sleep, and are about to decorate their green chambers for the birds, and hang up their Spring curtains to shelter the nests of the little songsters.

First appears the elder, in its green livery—that picturesque adorner of jagged fences—giving even a beauty to the unsightly ditches it overhangs. It grows in walled towns as well as beside lonely water-courses; and very pretty it looks, and delightful it smells, in Summer, when it has put forth its great bunches of creamy-white flowers. We hardly wonder at the Cockney tailor who, when he first saw an elder-tree in blossom, overhanging one of the pleasant streams that flow round Dulwich, exclaiming,—"What lovely cauliflowers those are on that tree!" To me it calls up visions of "elder-berrying days," when we sallied forth to gather the black luscious fruit, which our mothers made into elder-wine that circulated so freely at the merry Christmases which are numbered with the years that have departed. Then the pellet-guns, with which we shot at everything that lived or moved that came within reach, were formed of the hollowed boughs of the elder-tree. London boys know nothing about the pellet-guns and iron ramrods which are the common and too often dangerous playthings of country lads.

By the end of April several of the early-budding trees will be in leaf: the elm will don its green and graceful garment, and the oak begin to show its new bronzed-reddish clothing, looking not unlike the decaying leaves of Autumn, though upon close examination you find strong metallic-like hues which have not a fading touch about them. The beech begins to show its sprays, tinged with brownish purple, while the chesnut opens its fan-like sheath; and everywhere we see the dim green leaves of the lilac, and on the ends of the topmost branches a pale warm flush, which tells that the folded blossom will ere long expand. The lime, too, throws over all a soft shimmering of Spring's tenderest and sweetest green,—a green which is to the earth what the delicate azure is to the face of heaven. But foremost among my forest favourites for grace and beauty stands the lady-like birch: although she possesses none of the massy

grandeur of the oak, nor any of that tall stately majesty which we see in the elm, still there is something so delicate and pleasing in

her slender sprays, in the brown and silver of her stems,—just that colour which a staid and modest body chooses for her dress,

—and, above all, in the neatness of her foliage, that I wonder how an artist can ever think his landscape complete without she is in it. Nor must I omit to mention the falling flowers that hang like waving gold from the birch. Who that has ever inhaled the delicious smell arising from it after a shower, when the air around is filled with its perfume, can ever forget it? Its rich bark, too, is sometimes a perfect picture, touched with silver, umber, and yellow, which the fancy conjures into a thousand fantastic shapes. Evelyn is quite eloquent in his praises of birch-wine, which is really a refreshing beverage. The weeping-birch, in particular, is a beautiful tree, having a long and slender spray like the weeping-willow, and delicately-drooping foliage, which flutters in the lightest wind.

The blackthorn-hedges are now, in sunny places, white over with blossoms, which must not be mistaken for the May of the hawthorn, that seldom appears, unless in a very forward spring and in very sheltered and favourable situations, until the month is considerably advanced whose pleasant name it bears. The orchard-trees are now covered with blossom, the branches of the apple-trees looking as if they bore Herrick's parliament of "Lilies and Roses," while over the cottage-porches we see the dark trails of the woodbine.

There are but few trees more picturesque than the elm, and perhaps not any that have been so much used in ornamenting country-seats; and what can be a finer sight than a long avenue of these trees, shading the broad carriage-road which leads to an ancient mansion, towering high above their brethren of the forest, and excelling many of them in beauty and grandeur! It is also, as I have before stated, one amongst the first to brighten the spring with its refreshing greenness; and in autumn its light yellow leaves blend beautifully with the deep orange of the beech: and when in full foliage, there is no tree which waves in the wide wood that receives such bold masses of light and shade as it hangs with its small leaves in loose, airy lightness.

The beech, which has also put forth its leaves, was Gilbert White's favourite tree: he has been found fault with for naming it "the loveliest of all forest-trees;" and I trust also to be par-

doned for pronouncing it one of the most beautiful objects in creation. Find me another tree with so rich and glossy a leaf—one that looks so much like a gem of emerald when the sunbeams

fall full upon its foliage, and the gentle wind steals over its branches, producing an effect which no artist could ever represent! Then, again, it has the smoothest and clearest bark in the forest; and many a lover has cut his fair one's name upon its polished rind! There is also a sweeping grace in its drooping branches, hanging in every grand and unimaginable form. "They make spreading trees, and noble shades, with their well-furnished and glistering leaves," says old Evelyn; and but few men understood better the beauty of trees. Our ancestors made their beds of beech-leaves; and, on account of their lightness and loose lying together, these beds continued to be sweet for seven or eight years: they smelt also like green tea, and were doubtless very refreshing. There is also the purple beech, another beautiful ornament for parks and pleasure grounds, which has been known to grow to the height of thirty feet.

Trees are a delightful study; and it is pleasant to be so far acquainted with them as to be enabled to distinguish their different characters at a glance. This is not difficult in winter, when the ramifications, or forms of the branches, are so distinctly outlined; but in summer, when they have put on their full foliage, they are more alike; and there are some kinds which bear so close a resemblance to others as only to be recognised by a practised eye. In autumn, too, the pleasure of a country walk is increased by being able to point out every particular tree by the rich colours of its leaves—the varied hues of purple, olive, red, gold, green, and even crimson, which each tree at that season assumes.

I shall not dwell upon the individual features of fruit-trees, which now present a splendid appearance, sheeted in snowy silver that seems crimsoned with the tints of the morning clouds. Even the depths of the woods are illuminated with the white blossoms, that glitter like fallen clouds, as if the sky had scattered its floating silver in the forest. How lovely appear the cherry-blossoms, twining like wreaths of daisies around the branches, with scarcely a leaf visible; and the peaches spreading along the dull wall, with a blush upon their blossoming leaves, as if half abashed to meet the sun; while the huge almond blows above

them all, like one solid flower! Perhaps the loveliest of all are the apple-blossoms: there is not a flower either in the field or garden more beautiful. They seem made up of all that is

delightful in other flowers, embodying within themselves the richest and most delicate colourings. They wear the white innocence of childhood, and the shade of a thousand blushes, from the first faint spread to the last crimson flush that steals over the face of virgin beauty.

The chesnut as Spring advances puts forth its spreading leaves and flowers, which are truly beautiful all springing together, and make quite a screen for the honeysuckles, that have shot out their dark leaves by the sides of the cottage-porches, which they will ere long fill with fragrance. The earth grows greener every day. The knotty bloom of the ash has a fine effect, and, when minutely examined, appears singularly beautiful: the spray is also mingled at times in spring with the remains of the last year's keys, which being mixed with the black-tipped seed give a variety to the greenery.

But to see trees in Spring in all the beauty of perfection, we must visit some old English forest,—one that has never been touched or trimmed, but left to run wild, to be trained as Nature willed it,—where, as the poet Spenser says, there are arbours

"not by art,
But by the trees' own inclination made."

There are a few such places still remaining in England,—the New Forest, Sherwood, and numerous others,—and perhaps there is scarcely a county in England but what contains some portion of the remains of old forests. These are the places to see the trees grow in wild disorder—shooting up just where the sucker found room to rise, or the acorn to shoot; these are the spots for grey hoary old trunks, covered with moss, lichen, and centuries of

ivy. Here the underwood, in Spring, is lighted up with every imaginable green, while the foliage droops in such beautiful forms as a road-side artist never dreamed of. Then there are hollies, ever-green, growing about the gnarled and knotted knees of such oaks as make a town-bred man stare again, and an architect wonder how such far-extending branches can find support, with no other hold than that they have on the stems. Then there are such masses of shadow, and openings of all kinds of coloured lights, in these still, green, out-of-the-world places,—trees in places black, trees in places bright; here a bough, underneath dark as night, with its outer edge frosted with silver from the passing clouds, or stamped with a border of gold by the strong-handed sunshine; here an impenetrable wall of branches, dark as the grave; there the whole side of a long range of trees, fluttering in a sunlight of golden green, and descending into

hues of bronzy brown, until all below fades into the deep purple hue of twilight; excepting where, bald and bare, the silver light streams down from a white and fleecy cloud, and falling upon the trunk of some giant tree covered over with hoary lichen, gives to the mighty mass a dazzling and silvery hue. For this is

> Nature's great cathedral, where
> The lute-voiced birds—burst of the sweet spring band—
> Green-hooded angels—'mid the blossoms sing—
> Their leafy temple gloomy, tall and grand,
> Pillared with oaks, and roofed with Heaven's own hand.

What a mystery seems to hang about an old wood when the trees are covered with leaves, and the underwood is thick and impassable. We know not what flowers are growing in those untrodden solitudes; we cannot tell what birds build and hide in those hidden coverts; what badgers, weasels, polecats, martins, and snakes burrow, hide, climb, and bask, underground and in the hollows of trees, about the great mossy branches and on the unexplored banks, which accumulated leaves, and natural water-courses, and huge fallen trees have formed. It is this very difficulty of seeing beyond the few feet around us, that makes a wood so solemn. A hill or a moorland may be lonely, but there the view is open, whereas in the heart of an old wood all around us is dim, shadowy, green, and mysterious. Many of the trees are large and aged; and we feel that we are in the presence of strange things, that have grown old in light and darkness for centuries; that they have outlived all other living things, and around them there hangs a kind of reverential awe, such as makes us marvel not that in the early ages, when England was first peopled, they were worshipped by the Druids and their followers. Then we come upon deep dells, over which the gnarled and withered stem leans and the foliage darkens, and we marvel how these great hollows were first formed, for nowhere do they bear a trace of the hand of man. We know that the ancient Britons kept their corn in subterraneous places, which have slept undisturbed through the silence of many centuries. All trace of the work of these early excavations is buried beneath the accumulated gatherings of

a thousand autumns and winters, which have cast down and rotted their leaves.

Here quivering aspens bow before the gale,
And hawthorns blossom, hid in sunless shade;
The mournful ring-dove coos her tender tale,
The holly's shining leaves are here display'd,
While silver birches overhang the glade;
The towering elm shelters the dusky rook,
The hazel in green beauty is array'd,
The alder hangeth o'er the crispèd brook
In which the wildwood flowers in silence ever look.

And in such a spot the sudden starting of a large pheasant from out the deep underwood, as it goes with a loud "whur-r-r" high up amid the foliage, causes the lonely wanderer to spring back unconsciously, though he smiles the next moment at this needless alarm.

Trees, however, do not show to the best advantage in woods or forests; there they are generally too crowded to obtain a full

clear view of their beautiful forms, and the graceful sweep of the ever-moving foliage. Trees are seen best when standing alone, or in little clumps, which may contain few or many;—few when seen near at hand, several when viewed from a distance. It is in these clumps that we get such a variety of forms—when the boughs cut out sharp against the sky, and not a branch is seen in the whole outline, but what contributes to the beauty of the picture. A clump of trees shows best when tossed together, planted without form or order, in and out, one here, another there:—this catches the full light, that falls back into half shadow; a third goes deepening in, forming the dark purple of the picture; elms, oaks, aspen, with a dash of black fir-trees growing at all angles, wild, irregular, fantastic, yet each tree filling its own space when looked at separately, though, if it were taken away, the charm would at once be broken.

Trees have also a grand effect when seen from the bottom of a deep green glen, from which they go climbing up until the topmost boughs seem lost in the sky; for the trees and sky are all you can see overhead. Then there is generally a stream, or water of some description in the bed of the glen; it may be only a pool or small mere, which at a certain hour of the day gives an eye to the solitude, when the sun's rays dart deep down upon it. And all the little bits of underwood scattered at the bottom and along the sides, have at such a time lights of their own. The hazel-clumps bear no resemblance to the low creeping solid masses of bramble, nor the latter to the holly and thorn-bushes that stand out alone, above the fern and heather which creep about their feet, but each seems to have chosen the light that suited it best, and clothed itself with it. And here the birds build and sing, in this little green world of their own, finding in it all they require, without any assistance from man. Such spots conjure up the England of old, when the howl of wolves broke the midnight silence, and the wild boar whetted his tusks on the iron trunk of some giant oak. And an oak is always grand, no matter how shattered it may be. It always calls up old and solemn associations, and is always beautiful, either towering above its brethren of the wood, or standing in

lonely majesty upon a heath, or in an old English park! Abraham sat under an oak in the heat of the day,—so sayeth

one of the old fathers, Eusebius. Jacob hid the idols under the oak by Shechem. Rebecca's nurse was also buried under an

oak; and beneath its shadow was the angel of the Lord seated. The ancient Druids made it the emblem of their deity, and paid it divine honours. Poets have sung its praises. Shakespeare calls it—

"The unwedgeable and gnarled oak."

Spenser has beautifully described it verging to decay:

"A huge oak, dry and dead,
Still clad with reliques of its trophies old;
Lifting to heaven its aged, hoary head,
Whose foot on earth hath got but feeble hold,
And half disbowelled stands above the ground,
With wreathed roots and naked arms."

It is alike suited to the crumbling castle and the sequestered grange; it adds solemnity to the venerable abbey or the ruined shrine; and by throwing its fantastic and massy arms over the ivied wall, seems to make even ruins more venerable. Even in age it retains a beauty, when the boughs are withered or fallen away, when it bends over the resting-place of the dead, and but little more than the desolate trunk remains to brave the storms which it has faced for centuries. Almost every other tree shoots out its branches in level lines from the trunk; while the oak twists its boughs into grotesque forms, like a serpent coiling itself into a thousand fanciful figures as it moves along. There is nothing that grows upon the eternal hills which fills the soul with such emotions of sublimity as a mighty oak in all the glory of bough and foliage. The most magnificent ever grown in England was doubtless one which was dug from Hatfield Bog; it was an hundred and twenty feet in length.

Oaks also put on their new attire, but slowly, as if to show that their hardy limbs have less need to don their new clothing than their more effeminate brothers of the wood, but condescending at last to act like the rest, if it only be to shelter the birds, and keep the woodbine and wild flowers that grow around their knotted knees from withering.

What pictures float before us—what glimpses of rural objects does an old knotted oak call up! The hawk which we once saw poised almost motionless above it—the hare we startled from the

fern that grew at its feet—the gipsy camp, a few yards distant, which we first discovered by the smoke curling above its foliage—the ringdove we heard cooing, while lying idly in its cool shade—the brook that seemed to sing for a moment, and then to become silent again, just as the wind went and came among the

green oak-leaves—surely, man was never intended to spend his days in walled cities, without beholding the beauty with which the hand of God has clothed the earth, to instruct and delight him.

Even a life of toil and suffering is sweetened by the remembrance of scenes like these, for they are pleasures that pass not away, but are ever stepping unaware upon us, throwing sudden bursts of "sunshine upon the shady place," and cheering sorrow in its solitude. By my own hearth I can traverse hundreds of miles of pleasant scenery, can call up an hundred landscapes of

forest, hill, river, valley, and pastoral plain; of village, and tree, and stile; of winding highways and pleasant field-paths, even to the very figures that dot the scenery, and the parting boughs above my head, that let in little patches of clear blue sky; and during such rambles as these, England has seemed to be my own great freehold. If the selfish Lord of the soil refused me admittance through his gate, I sought the nearest eminence that overlooked it, peeped at his deer, and his avenues, his sheets of water, where the white swans floated, and carried off in my heart images of pleasure that delighted me for days after, while he moved only before my "mind's eye," like the ill-formed scarecrow, that gave "disgust, but hurt not;" nor did I love Nature less, because he was placed there for a time, though I sometimes sat down beside his wall, and "taxed Heaven with unkindness;" but this feeling soon passed away, my wrath reached not through fourteen lines of the next sonnet I "crooned" over.

In Spring the bark-peelers and wood-cutters are at work amongst the trees; and what with the chips, the bark, and the smell of the rising sap, there comes steaming upon the air the most healthy and wholesome aroma that ever mortal would wish to inhale. It neither resembles a bed of flowers nor a hay-field, nor can it ever be inhaled anywhere but in the woods where such healthy labour is carried on. There is something very primitive and picturesque in this forest labour—we can imagine no employment more ancient—from the time when the first early settlers, the old Cymry of Britain, landed upon our island, and called it "The country of the Sea Cliffs," hewed down the trees, and built themselves rude huts in the gloomy old woods, which the wolf, the wild boar, the maned bison, and the antlered stag had hitherto inhabited; even from that remote period may the occupation of the woodman be dated. We watch him at his work, and see the giant oak, that will ere long bear the thunder of the British cannon to some foreign shore, fall prostrate with an awful crash—loud enough to startle every Dryad, that

> "Haunted spring and vale, edg'd with poplar pale,
> With flower inwoven, tresses torn,
> In twilight shades of tangled thickets mourn."

Nor is it possible for a healthy man to inhale this delightful aroma, or watch these hardy foresters at their work, without feeling almost as strong a temptation as they do, to taste the contents of their baskets, and drink from the huge stone bottles which they are ever lifting up, with bare brawny arms, to their lips; for in such scenes as these, wholesome and homely hunger is to be found.

While rambling through the woods in a fine sunny day, at this season of the year, the snake may often be seen, basking on some dry warm bank, having quitted its winter quarters, and come out from among the dead leaves, or the roots of the tree under which it had so long slept. It will, however, generally be found in the neighbourhood of a water-course; and woe be to the mice, birds, or lizards that first fall in its way, after so long a fast! The snake is an expert swimmer, carrying its head beautifully erect, as it glides rapidly through the water, easy as an eel. The skin which it casts off may sometimes be found turned inside out, among the thorns of a furze-bush, or in the entangling brambles of the underwood. The viper, which is the only venomous reptile that is found in our English forests, is not so common as the snake; and, when met with, is always in a hurry to escape. It is a question open to much doubt, whether any one ever yet died through the bite of a viper:—if a small portion of ammonia is swallowed, and the wound rubbed over with oil, there is but little to be dreaded from the fangs of this reptile—so say the wiseacres. Still it is as well to look about you before sitting down on some old tree that has been felled some time, for there snakes and adders are sure to hide.

Both in summer and winter, all who have narrowly observed the changes of the seasons, must have been struck by the abundant moisture found under trees. Pace only a common footpath, dry, high, gravelly or sandy, on a frosty morning after the sun has shone for an hour or so; and wherever a tree overhangs your walk, there the ground is saturated with wet, while all beside is comparatively dry. So it is in June—in foggy weather, beneath the trees, the road is a perfect puddle, when all the land around is dry as a desert, especially if it is covered with ivy. In

hilly countries too, we find ponds, which are not overhung with foliage, empty and dry; while others which are shaded with branches, are filled with water; and nearly everywhere is this the case, unless the pools draw their supplies from springs. Those who travel in the night are well acquainted with the quantity of moisture which descends in the form of dew or fog, and scarcely leaves a trace of its "whereabout," excepting on the trees and plants, an hour after the sunrise.

But of all the trees that blossom in Spring, most do I worship the Hawthorns, when they are sheeted over with the fragrant blossoms of May. There is to my fancy no aroma like May-buds—no fragrance upon earth so deliciously sweet. Then, to think that there are thousands of miles of these sweet hedges, all covered with May, winding in and out, all over the face of green old England! to know that even "looped and windowed raggedness," the poorest beggar that ever wandered in want by the wayside, can inhale this healthy fragrance untaxed, and that no one, so long as he is free, can prevent him from revelling in this heaven-sent perfume.—Ah! that is something, my Lord, and my Lady, whosoever you may be, and he gets heartier sniffs of it than you do in your silk-lined chariots. Then, May has such an old scent too; for there never was a time since a tree sprang up on our island, but what there was the hawthorn. Saxon maidens gathered May when they rose in the old early morning to milk the "nolt" in the daisied fields where Alfred meditated. Kings and queens went forth in other days with splendid retinues to gather May—beautiful ladies left their tiring-bowers in the turreted castle, and crossed the moat in the grey dawn of morning, to bathe their rosy cheeks in the dew of the Maybuds before the sun had risen. And I, while idling in the green lanes, once threw myself lazily under the shadow of a blossoming hawthorn, and sang—

HOW MAY WAS FIRST MADE.

As Spring upon a silver cloud
Lay looking on the world below,
Watching the breezes as they bowed
The buds and blossoms to and fro,

She saw the fields with Hawthorns walled :
Said Spring, " New buds I will create."
She to a Flower Spirit called,
Who on the month of May did wait,
And bade her fetch a Hawthorn spray,
That she might make the buds of May.

Said Spring, " The grass looks green and bright,
The Hawthorn-hedges too are green,
I'll sprinkle them with flowers of light,
Such stars as earth hath never seen ;
And all through England's velvet vales,
Her steep hill-sides and haunted streams,
Where woodlands dip into the dales,
Where'er the Hawthorn stands and dreams,
Where thick-leaved trees make dark the day,
I'll light the land with flowers of May.

" Like pearly dew-drops, white and round,
The shut-up buds shall first appear,
And in them be such fragrance found
As breeze before did never bear ;
Such as in Eden only dwelt,
When angels hover'd round its bowers,
And long-hair'd Eve at morning knelt
In innocence amid the flowers ;
While the whole air was every way
Fill'd with a perfume sweet as May.

" And oft shall groups of children come,
Threading their way through shady places,
From many a peaceful English home,
The sunshine falling on their faces ;
Starting with merry voice the thrush,
As through green lanes they wander singing,
To gather the sweet Hawthorn-bush ;
Which homeward in the evening bringing
With smiling faces, they shall say,
'There's nothing half so sweet as May.'

" And many a poet yet unborn
Shall link its name with some sweet lay,
And children oft at early morn
Shall gather blossoms of the May ;
With eyes bright as the silver dews
Which on the rounded May-buds sleep,
And parted lips whose smiles diffuse
A sunshine o'er the watch they keep,

Shall open all their white array
Of pearls, ranged like the buds of May.

"Spring shook the cloud on which she lay,
And silver'd o'er the Hawthorn spray,
Then shower'd down the buds of May."

SWEET SPRING TIME.

BEAUTY OF APRIL—COUNTRY ROADS—A VILLAGE—AN OLD PARK—THE MILK-MAID—PROGRESS OF SPRING—LAMBS—MARKET-DAY PICTURES—PALM-SUNDAY—REPTILES—INSECTS—A RURAL SCENE—OLD MEMORIES.

UPON the daisied green of April, Spring has now planted her sunny feet, and many a sweet flower has diapered the ground; to form a rich carpet for her to tread upon. The leaves grow longer every day, to shelter her fair form from the showers; and many a bird has flown back from over the seas, to welcome her coming with his sweet song. For oh! she is beautiful to look upon. Her eyes are blue as her own April skies; her cheeks dyed with the blushing crimson of apple-blossoms; her white and blue-veined neck, beautiful as a bed of lilies of the valley, intersected with streaking violets; while her silken hair streams out like her own acacias,

that throw their gold and green upon the breeze. Around her brow is twined a wreath of May-blossoms—pearly buds, but yet unblown. High above her head the skylark soars; in the lowly brake the linnet warbles; from the tall tree-tops a hundred birds are singing, and she comes with music above, below, and around her. The primrose-coloured sky, the insects that hum and wanton in the air, the flowers that rise above the bladed grass, the bursting buds that are daily peeping out among the trees, all proclaim that Spring is come again.

How cheering to hear one country neighbour greet another over the little garden-fence, and exclaim, "Oh, what a sweet Spring time this is, and how beautifully the grass is coming up; why, do you know, I set my foot on nine daisies all at once this morning, as I went to the milking-meadows, and that's always reckoned a sure sign that we shall have a sweet Spring time." How pleasant to walk forth early, and hear the low murmuring of the bee, or watch it settle down among the few flowers that have already opened, and before the village clock has struck six, to see the red round sun heaving up above the high green-shouldered hills! The very streams, as they hurry along, break forth into song, telling the flowers that are asleep upon their banks it is time to awaken, that birds are already building in the bushes they have hurried past, and that the small fry are chasing one another round the smooth pebbles which they have come dancing over.

How different are the out-of-door sounds now from what they were a few weeks ago. Then, beyond the gritting of wheels on the road, the ploughboy's whistle in some far-off field, or the solitary cawing of the rook, the whole landscape slept in comparative silence. Now the hills and valleys are alive with cattle; from nearly every hedge and tree the birds are singing; on the banks, where before the winter grass lay wan and withered, the flowers are now blooming; and the bee is abroad with his approving murmur, as if sole surveyor over all. The hedges no longer look ruinous and rent, the unsightly gaps are filled up with pleasant leaves—like shabby houses, they are now put into good repair; for Spring, who "paints the meadows with delight,"

has once more made them habitable, and they are now all let for another season to the birds. Nature seems to delight as much in her new attire as the sons and daughters of man; nor is she without her admirers, if even human eye regarded her not. The

wild rose in the forest solitude is visited by the bees and butterflies—they come like lovers to look upon her in her secluded haunts, and blow all the sweeter in the wilderness that is untrodden by the foot of man.

Pleasant it is to wander through some little hamlet in Sweet

Spring time, where the village-green, which no one seems to claim, is breezy and open to all, and in the centre of which stands the large old solitary oak, elm, or sycamore, spreading its shadowy branches above the rude benches that surround its trunk. Pleasant it is to think of the many good and evil tidings which have for ages been talked of there, for it is a perfect English picture; to see the old men, when their day's work is done, assemble there one after another, smoking their pipes, and sitting down to talk over the progress of crops, the appearance of the weather, the health and prosperity, or adversity of their neighbours, while their children are rolling and laughing upon the grass, or playing with the harmless shepherd's dog. And then to observe the knowing looks of the older children, drinking in the words of the elders with wonder, and marvelling in their little minds how such things can be—how care can exist in a world where there are so many birds'-nests, so much good milk, such large hunches of brown bread and cheese, and so many green fields and beautiful flowers! And then the strange conclusions they come to when among themselves,—the various versions of what they have heard, and the wonderful constructions they put upon things too weighty for their intellects! Even then you may trace dawnings of the stronger mind; the doubting look, the unwillingness to give credence to every decision, the knowing shake of the head, and all those little motions which indicate doubt. The questions they put to their parents, the sparkling of their eyes when their minds are just able to grapple with the subject, and the shrewd way in which they make their inquiries, are well worth studying.

Then to look round the green, and see all those little white-washed cottages so neatly thatched, seldom containing more than one story, but each standing upon plenty of ground, with a little garden at the front, a few bee-hives, or a row of milk-pans, all clean and arranged in order; some of the fronts overgrown with woodbine, which in their unchecked luxuriance have partially hidden the parlour-window. Then to think of the beauty, the health, the repose that breathe around such spots; the singing of birds, the humming-bees, the gaudy butterflies, passing or

crossing each other, the waving of the trees, the lowing of kine, the bleating of sheep, the neighing of young colts, the milk-maid's song as she walks past with well-filled pail, or sits under some pleasant tree—all these are things that sink into the heart, sights that we sigh for in vain in the dense city, amid the roll of carriages and the vociferations of jostled passengers. Then, to see the sun set upon such a tranquil scene, the blue smoke rising in twisted pillars and mixing with the deep foliage, the sloping beam gilding a distant rivulet, or bathing in crimson the top of a far-off wood; the church-spire rising in its grey antiquity, and looking down upon the lovely scene scattered at its base; the dim outline of the hills, the faint mist spreading over the valleys, a bell just heard from some neighbouring village, the falling weir, the bay of a distant mastiff, the clap of an old gate, or the song of the ploughboy returning home! Live not all these images in the heart? chasing away even care while we contemplate them, and throwing a soothing tranquillity over the soul—a rest which we remember, a poetry which owns no words, a delight which can never be forgotten, but can be recalled at any time, no matter how far removed from the scene we may be, —nay, can be seen even in the dark, whenever the "inward eye" of Memory opens.

Pleasant it is, too, to traverse some old English park, where the gate to the wooded entrance stands invitingly open to all who choose to unlatch it, for time-out-of-mind there has been a right-of-way over that lordly domain.

We love the green free old foot-path best, though there is nothing to prevent us from going up the grand carriage-road, to which no end of wooded walks lead after we have passed the little wicket, though from the high road it looks forbidding enough. But even from that point we can look through the huge iron gates, that swing upon tall stone pillars, each crowned with a couchant greyhound, and there see the long avenue overhung with noble elms, through which here and there the sunshine streams and causes the yellow and well-rolled ground to glitter like gold. At the front of the hall we see an old fountain throwing its "loosened silver" into a large conch-shell of granite,

above which a stony Triton bends, as if ever listening to the low-voiced waterfall. We hear the low murmuring; and the air that

comes laden with the perfume from a thousand flowers, even seems made cooler by the sound, as if we felt the silver spray

playing upon our cheek. Above the dead-eyed Triton, round whose brow the green ivy has twined, stands a peacock with his gorgeous train expanded, screaming at intervals, and drowning the fountain's sound. We see the ancient oaks throwing their gnarled arms over the hills and valleys, and extending their shadows above the fern and gorse; and the golden broom, standing with its burnished helmet in the sunlight. Occasionally we catch a glimpse of some stately swan arching its silver neck, and scudding along the broad lake, just descried by the straggling beam that sleeps upon its surface, glinting between the trees above the tall rushes that skirt its margin. Herds of deer are

also scattered in picturesque positions, some lifting up their antlered heads, and browsing upon the young branches that fall within their reach, while others lie upon the cool grass, beneath the deep umbrage of old trees, or are trooping through the open glades at full speed, now glancing by some winding avenue, then bounding over the distant hillock, and anon lost in the far-off thicket.

We hear the cawing of rooks as they hover round their airy city, buried in the rich foliage of the elms. The soft coo of the ringdove floats upon the whispering wind that sweeps lazily by, laden with the perfume of the woodbine. The lowing of kine reaches us from some rich pasture, which is hidden from our

sight by the clustering beeches; we see the long-eared hare nestling on her seat in a tuft of high grass, or the rabbit hopping across some footpath, and hastening to its burrow in the sand-bank by the young plantation; and the hawk wheeling above the summit of the gnarled hawthorn, or poising himself over his prey, and then dropping like a plummet from our sight; while the heron wafts herself above the tops of the tall pines,

now seen for a moment sweeping over a sea of branches, then vanishing in the distance, or alighting by the still lakes in quest of food. We see portions of the old hall through the openings of the trees; here a turret arises, towering above the topmost boughs of a large oak; there a stack of chimneys is seen, the blue smoke curling in fantastic wreaths between the foliage;

while glimpses of lawns and shrubberies, and grey pillars, and stone-mullioned windows, and the cackling of hens, and the gabbling of ducks, and the deep baying of the mastiff, and the low bleating of some pet lamb, tell us that wealth, and happiness, and beauty, with all pleasant sights and sounds, are embosomed among the tall trees.

> "There, plunged amid the shadows brown,
> Imagination lays him down,
> Attentive, in his airy mood,
> To every murmur of the wood."

But here is the "Old Park Road" turned into verse, while smoking a cigar at the foot of one of the hoary old oaks.—

Time out of mind, that road of trees
Has led where yonder village spire
Rises above the meadow-leas;
Round the old hall of the good squire
It winds, past shrubbery and lawn,
Where box-edged beds, and close-pleached bowers,
Hung with the silver dews of dawn,
Enclose a little land of flowers.

The throstle to her callow brood,
While May's in bloom, is all day singing,
Where ring-doves have for ages coo'd;
And every wind is busy bringing
Tidings where perfumes may be found;
Odours which red-streaked woodbines blow
From their long trumpets far around,
To tell the breezes where they grow.

Birds sing like nuns amid the green
Which roofs that long wide high-arched aisle;
Where golden lights stream in between,
Like windows of some hoary pile
Deep-dyed with saints, and sunny hues
Which on the chequered floor are thrown,
And o'er the swarded path diffuse
Flashes of green and golden brown.

Bell-like the cuckoo's note rings there,
And seems by hollow echoes made
To summon all birds, far and near,
To anthem in the lengthened shade

Of that dim-lighted avenue ;
The nightingale her even-song,
'Mid folded flowers and cooling dew,
Doth to the grey of morn prolong.

All round a brooding quiet dwells,
And one might fancy, 'mid the gloom
Which reigns o'er those embowered dells,
That Nature, in her silent loom,
Worked summer hangings for the trees,
Which are by unseen fingers drawn,
When thrown back by the passing breeze
To let in gleams of golden dawn.

No stir of busy life is there,
Save at fair-time, or market-day ;
When to the neighbouring town repair
The rustics by that pleasant way.
They down the distant walks appear
At first in hues of misty shade,
Which kindle as the forms draw near,
Till every varying tint 's displayed.

A country lover and his lass,
Her gaudy shawl of crimson bright,
From shifting shade to sunshine pass ;
A little maiden clad in white,
Shepherds in frocks of olive grey,
Slow moving forward, next are seen ;
And where the gaps of sunlight lay,
Seem as if steeped in golden-green.

The sportsman rests beneath the shade,
And sees his dogs, by fitful gleams,
Into the deepening umber fade,
Then dart out where the sunshine streams.
With white pail balanced on her head,
And one hand pressed against her side,
Her long hair down her shoulders spread,
The milkmaid moves with measured stride.

The scattered wild rose of the wood
Lies in her path, and tells a tale
How she in the deep twilight stood,
Now blushing red, then turning pale,
With modest eyes fixed on the ground,
And there threw leaf by leaf away,
His arm her waist encircling round,
While neither had a word to say.

And unripe nuts strewn on the path
Tell how the village children go,
Regardless of the good squire's wrath,
Where the fawn feeds beside the doe:
Amid the fern and brachen brown,
Deep in the tangled hazel shade;
They smile to see him try to frown,
And pass on singing through the glade.

But of all the figures that move across the landscape in sweet Spring time, the most pleasing is a pretty milkmaid; and here I introduce her for the sake of the following highly poetical and truly beautiful description by Sir Thomas Overbury: it is worthy of a place beside the sweetest bits of Izaak Walton's word-painting. Until very recently Overbury's works were very scarce; nor is his name now so well known as a writer as it deserves to be. I need not, I am sure, point out the many exquisite touches this rural picture contains. "A fair and happy milkmaid is a country wench that is so far from making herself beautiful by art that one look of hers is able to put all face-physic out of countenance. She knows a fair look is but a dumb orator to commend virtue, therefore minds it not. All her excellencies stand in her so silently, as if they had stolen upon her without her knowledge. The lining of her apparel, which is herself, is far better than outsides of tissue; for though she be not arrayed in the spoils of the silk-worm, she is decked in innocence—a far better wearing. She doth not, with lying long in bed, spoil both her complexion and condition: Nature hath taught her that immoderate sleep is rust to the soul; she rises therefore with chanticleer, her dame's cock, and at night makes the lamb her curfew. In milking a cow, and straining the teats through her fingers, it seems that so sweet a milk-press makes the milk whiter or sweeter, for never came almond glove or aromatic ointment on her palm to taint it. The golden ears of corn fall and kiss her feet when she reaps them, as if they wished to be bound prisoners by the same hand that felled them. Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new-made haycock. She makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pity; and when winter

evenings fall early, sitting at her merry wheel, she sings defiance to the wheel of Fortune. She doth all things with so sweet a grace, it seems ignorance will not suffer her to do ill, being her mind to do well. She bestows her year's wages at the next fair,

and in choosing her garments counts no bravery in the world like decency. The garden and bee-hive are all her physic and surgery, and she lives the longer for it. She dares go alone and unfold sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because

she means none ; yet, to say truth, she is never alone, but is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers—but short ones ; yet they have their efficacy, in that they are not palled with ensuing idle cogitations. Lastly, her dreams are so chaste, that she dare tell them ; only a Friday's dream is all her superstition,—that she conceals for fear of augur. Thus lives she, and all her care is that she may die in Spring time, to have store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet."

The ears of rye are now seen bursting through their long flag-like sheaths ; the spring corn has also broken from the loose earth, and waves in the wind down the long furrows like immense sheets of green silk.

The woods have now a beautiful appearance, for the trees have only put on a part of their foliage ; and where in a few more weeks all will be clothed in a leafy darkness, there now reigns a green soft light—an emerald sunshine. Each tree also still shows its fine tracery ;—the wiry twigs, the feathery branches, covered with ivy and enamelled moss of various hues, while the stronger boughs throw out their iron arms in every direction. There too are the silver brooks "kissing the feet" of the tall trees with murmurs, and making sweet melody as they glide along, reflecting the blue sky, and the young leaves which glitter around many a new-made nest. The wild-rose uplifts its amber cup on the thick hedges, as if wooing the dews to alight ; and the trailing woodbine will soon blush along the wood-side, and load the breeze with sweet odours ; while the wild-cherry, sheeted with blossoms, rears up like a pillar of snow in the forest. The tulip-tree is in full leaf,—the flowers of the chestnut are appearing,—and the lilac sends forth a pleasant smell. The leaves of the mulberry have put out : the tall fir, the majestic oak, and the lovely beech, are also in flower : so is the elm, the mountain-ash, the alder, the horse-chestnut, laburnum, and Guelder-rose. Nearly all the trees before the end of May put on their Summer dress—every day the woods look greener—most of the Spring flowers are in full bloom—and the birds also are in full song. A thousand winged insects hum in the air—the bee is on the wing—the butterflies are out in the sunshine—and the fields are

filled with music. From the woods also come the melancholy "coo" of the ring-dove, broken at intervals by the pleasing piping of the golden-billed blackbird; and there may be seen the little white-throat, hopping from bush to bush, as it tries to attract your attention and lead you away from its nest. The shriek of the jay, the shrill cry of the woodpecker, and the "weet-weeting" of the chaffinch, together with the tinkling note of the titmouse, make such a concert in the leafy covert as can only be heard at sweet Spring time.

Amid all the pleasant out-of-door pictures which sweet Spring time brings, not one excels that of a daisied field, in which are seen the snow-white lambs at play. There is such a Spring-sound about their bleating!—it is much more plaintive and innocent than the deep baa they give utterance to in the height of Summer. How amusing to watch some little long-legged woolly fellow, that has lost his dam! How like a child he acts, that has missed its mother, running here and there, with a low plaintive cry, and not even hearing, for the noise he himself makes, the distant answer of the old sheep, who is calling to him in the best way she can to come to her! The instinct, or reason, of these "silly sheep," as we are too apt to call them, is wonderful; and I cannot resist quoting an instance in proof of it, as it comes from such high authority as the "Magazine of Natural History." "I observed a young lamb," said the writer, "entangled among briars. It had, seemingly, struggled for liberty until it was quite exhausted. Its mother was present, endeavouring with her head and feet to disentangle it. After having attempted in vain, for a long time, to effect this purpose, she left it, and ran away baaing with all her might. We fancied there was something peculiarly doleful in her voice. Thus she proceeded across three large fields, and through four strong hedges, until she came to a flock of sheep. From not having been able to follow her, I could not watch her motions when with them. However, she left them in about five minutes, accompanied by a large ram that had two powerful horns. They returned speedily to the poor lamb, and as soon as they reached it, the ram immediately set about liberating it, which

he did in a few minutes, by dragging away the briars with his horns." A stronger proof of sheep possessing reason was never adduced than this: it must have been something more than mere instinct that urged the poor dam to force her way through four strong hedges. But the most wonderful of all consists in communicating her distress to the ram, and bringing him back with her. What human mother could have done more, after having endeavoured, but in vain, by her own exertions, to rescue her child from danger? We never see them without thinking of innocent and happy children gambolling and running races with each other over the fields. Then they appear so bold, halting until you have nearly reached them, and fixing their little eyes knowingly upon you; then bleating, and scampering off to their dams.

The shepherds have often to be in attendance all night during the lambing season, to render assistance to the ewes, and to look after such lambs as are ailing,—which are taken home to the

farmhouses, and kept warm by the fire, and supplied with milk. Dyer thus describes them :—

> "When the new-dropt lamb,
> Tottering with weakness by his mother's side,
> Feels the fresh world about him, and each thorn,
> Hillock, or furrow trips his feeble feet,
> Oh ! guard his meek sweet innocence from all
> The innumerous ills that rush around his life !"

Bloomfield, after giving a beautiful picture of young lambs trying their speed with each other, down the slope and up the hillock, describes them as stopping to gather breath for a few moments, yet so eager to pursue their play, that—

> "A bird, a leaf, will set them off again ;
> Or if a gale with strength unusual blow,
> Scattering the wild-briar roses into snow,
> Their little limbs increasing efforts try."

Another pleasant picture of Spring time is the ploughman, who gives all the air a "countryfied smell," as he turns up the sleeping furrows, causing you to sigh as you think of badly-drained streets and ill-ventilated houses, which you are doomed to breathe amongst in the city,—places which rosy Health rarely plants her foot upon, for if she alights there the bloom upon her cheek at once begins to fade, and unless she hurries back to the breezy hills and greenwood sides, she will be compelled to bow her head in wan Consumption's sickly lap.

So conducive to health is the aroma arising from the newly-ploughed earth, that we have frequently seen an invalid seated in a chair, secured to a kind of truck which was attached to the horses, and dragged along behind the ploughman, whose labour was not at all impeded by his passenger, excepting that it required more care when turning round at each end of the field. What heavy masses of clay at times cling to the ploughman's boots. You wonder how he manages to get along with such a clog to his heels ; every stride he takes, the mass accumulates ; and when, after many shakes, he gets rid of it, there lies a clog weighing pounds upon the furrow, the upper part bearing the impression of every nail in his boot. His hands are hard as

horn through holding the plough; and if he has followed the same labour for years, there is a peculiar roundness about the shoulders which tells that the continued grasping of those bright shafts is no easy work.

The roads have a different appearance now from what they had a few months ago; there are more moving figures in the landscape, especially when it is market-day—such a scene as we have attempted to describe in a little poem, where

Busy forms move o'er the landscape brown
In twos and threes, for it is market-day.
Beyond those hills stretches a little town,
And thitherward the rustics bend their way,
Crossing the scene in red, and blue, and grey,
Now by the hedge-rows, now by oak trees old,
As they by stile or low-thatched cottage stray.
Peep through the rounded hand, then you'll behold
Such scenes as Morland drew in frames of sunny gold.

A laden ass, a maid with wicker maun,
A shepherd's lad driving his lambs to sell;
Gaudy-dress'd girls move in the sunny dawn,
Women whose cloaks become the landscape well,

Farmers whose thoughts on crops and prices dwell.
An old man with his cow and calf draws near.
Anon you hear the village carrier's bell;
Then doth his grey old tilted cart appear,
Moving so slow, you think he never will get there.

But "slow and sure" has been for years his motto; and he will not only get there in time for the market, but stop and bait at a little road-side house, the swing sign of which you can just distinguish by the white post that supports it, on the left at the foot of the hill.

Palm-Sunday was an old holiday which our ancestors kept with great reverence, in remembrance of our Saviour's entrance into Jerusalem; and it is still a custom to ornament the houses in the country with the silvery buds of the willow (which are called palm) in the present day. These buds, which lie like great oval pearls upon the slender stems of the osiers, are the first that appear in sweet Spring time, generally showing themselves long before the hawthorn has put forth a single speck of green. They are frequently seen in the cottage windows overtopping a border of sweet primroses, snowdrops, or violets, which have blown before the coming of Easter. Many a mild Spring day has seen us out with our youthful companions in the fields beside the river Trent, gathering the buds of the willow and the white blossoms of the blackthorn, which also hang upon the hedges, like a cloud of flowers, long before a green leaf, excepting that of the alder, has shot out of its wintry sheath. Although it was not the palm of Palestine we gathered, yet it was such as our forefathers had for centuries chosen as the emblem of those green branches which were scattered before our Redeemer; and to us it brought back an old and holy picture, carrying the imagination into that ancient city of the East, and bringing before the "mind's eye" one of those impressive scenes which are linked with the establishment of the Christian religion. It also called up the figures of those pious pilgrims who wandered into the Holy Land, and visited many a distant shrine, bearing the palm-branch in their hands—the acknowledged token of peace and prayer.

The abolition of these sacred emblems, which once adorned our churches, and were borne in our Easter processions, could be of no benefit to the progress of religion. They were the productions of Nature, not the work of man: they served to show that He who ruleth the seasons had again sent Spring with all her flowers; and with these were linked the memory of the Son of God, who rode not forth in regal purple, crowned with gold, but "meek, and sitting upon an ass." Such associations did the silver buds bring to the early Christians, and the custom of palm-gathering was kept up until the Reformation in England.

With what delight did we hail the first appearance of these pearl-like buds—they told us that Spring was near at hand; the sun also came to throw his light upon them two hours earlier than he did a few weeks before; and in the budding hedges we had already discovered the sky-stained eggs of the hedge-sparrow. Well can we remember the woods where we gathered the first primroses, and which were soon to be green with lilies-of-the-valley. What a refreshing smell there was about the earth we dug up to get at the moss-covered roots of those early primroses, for they were the first treasures which we transplanted to our little gardens, where, day by day, they lost that beautiful bloom which they only bear in the solitude of the wild-wood. The sounds of youthful voices seem in accordance with the opening of this happy season, as they fall at intervals upon the ear, filling up the pauses which occur between the singing of the blackbird or the thrush, and wafting pleasant memories to the wanderer, telling him that eager eyes are already watching the opening beauties of the flowers.

Palm-Sunday recalled old times, old names, and things of ancient date,—such reminding us that above a thousand years ago our Saxon forefathers had no other landmarks to distinguish the boundaries of their estates than the objects of Nature; a tree, a bush, or a water-course, served them instead of walls and hedges; and we can almost fancy that we are overlooking those old English landscapes while reading some of their ancient deeds of conveyance. One estate is mentioned in a deed, dated 886, as stretching along from Sheep-lea to the Broad Bramble, past

the Old Gibbet-place and the Old Ford, along the Deep-dell, to the Thorn on the Mere, thence to the Red-cross, by the stream of Alders, up the Milk-valley by the Foresters' Mark, and along the Hay-meadow. Another goes from the Bridge by the Eel-ditch, past the Bourn and the Great Willow, from the Hoary Thorn to the Oak-tree, by the Three Hills and the Thorn Maple to the Three Trees, the Deep Brook and the Clear Pool, by the Black Willow, the Nettle Island, the Sedge Moor, past the Burrows, the Hillock, the Ship Oak, the Great Aspen, by the Reedy Slough, and onward to the Hoary Apple-tree beyond the Wolf-pit.

What an assemblage of old poetical names have we here: we can see the half-drained and half-cultivated country; we can picture it in miry March, with its reedy meres and impassable sloughs—the rude wooden bridge by which the ploughman crossed over the quaking bog to get at the rich land which lay beyond. Yet amid these wilds and old forest-fastnesses the violets and primroses blowed as they do now, and the Saxon serf was cheered by the skylark's song while he laboured in those old hedgeless wastes. The bleating of young lambs was then heard upon the wold—the ice-freed brooks rolled merrily along; and though he fared hard by day, and at night had a block of wood for his pillow, Nature was still his comforter, and he found solace in the sights and sounds that greeted his eye and ear when he wandered along over the opening daisies.

Such associations as these are pleasant company to one when wandering in the country: we never seem to be alone; for every hill and valley is peopled with the fanciful forms of departed years.

Now in the ponds and ditches may be seen hundreds of little frogs, and tadpoles with their round heads and long tails, bearing, at present, no more resemblance to a frog than an egg does to a living bird. They are devoured in millions by the fishes. If they miss the jaws of the finny tribe, there are the newts ready to prey upon them; if they escape the newts, there are no end of water-fowl on the look-out: the snake feeds upon them as soon as they can leap: stoats and weasels dine off them, wher

nothing better can be had; and they can scarcely move anywhere without meeting with an enemy. On no account ought frogs to be driven out of gardens that are infested with slugs; for these are a favourite food; and wherever frogs are found, the slugs soon disappear. The way in which the frog seizes its prey is by throwing its tongue forward. The action is quick as thought—no sooner is the tongue out than the slug has vanished: it is impossible for the eye to detect the action, it is so momentary. In winter, the frog buries itself in the mud, at the bottom of ponds and ditches, where it remains until spring, when it comes forth; and you may then see on the top of the water a number of black spots floating in a jelly-like substance. These are the spawn, or eggs, in which the tiny tadpoles are enclosed. Frogs possess the power of breathing through the skin; and it is no easy task to either hang or drown them. It is now stale information to state that the toad is not venomous, but is as perfectly harmless as the frog, and equally useful in gardens. It is an unnecessary cruelty to destroy these inoffensive reptiles: they have sufficient enemies without man waging war against them; he, above all, ought to be their protector.

Now white and copper butterflies make their appearance; the emperor moth may also be seen, and the dull, low, jarring note of the mole-cricket heard. The saw-fly, the dread and terror of all gooseberry growers, awakens from its winter sleep, and commences its work of destruction. Many are the beautiful names given to the butterflies and moths in the Midland Counties; such as the tortoise-shell, the primrose-coloured, the green-veined; and, amongst moths, the winter-beauty, the cross-wing, the oak-beauty, orange under-wing, garden-carpet, brindled-beauty, red-chestnut, angle-shaded, the triple-spot, the fox-moth, and numberless others, whose very names suggest pleasant thoughts, now begin to flutter about in the sunny days and warm evenings that come in with the close of April. The wood-ant makes its appearance this month: it is the largest of our British ants, and is readily distinguished from the others by the rich brown with which it is marked in the middle. Their nests are frequently found in the woods around London; and, though

at first you would fancy the rounded nest was only a heap of loose litter, yet, on a closer examination, you will see it is regularly formed, and admirably adapted for carrying off the rain, and on a fine day the roof will be found all alive with busy workers. Every avenue which leads to the nest is securely closed at night, and opened again on the following morning, excepting on rainy days, when they remain within their covered habitations, and seldom stir abroad. If the avenues are only partially opened in the morning, it is a sure sign that there will be rain in the course of the day; for there is scarcely a more unerring indicator of the weather than may be found in watching the motions of the wood-ant.

The habits of bees ought to rank chief amongst those of insects; those "singing masons" that build "roofs of gold," who go out with "merry March," to rob the velvet buds. How naturally comes to the mind that beautiful description of Shakespere's, which everybody must be familiar with who reads his works. With what state the queen bee sets out, when she quits her hive; what pursuivants, heralds, outriders, attendants, who wear belts of gold, swell her train, and "go sounding" through the "flowery towns" she passes. What order rules her household, filled as it is with nurses who feed the young, and waiters who bring provisions to the builders, and busy scouts who are ever running to and fro and carrying in food; kneaders of wax, and skilful architects, who work with mathematical accuracy, and display the greatest knowledge both in the saving of material and labour, though their work is completed in the most perfect manner. Thanks to the naturalists who have made the habits of these English "humming birds" their study, we are daily becoming more familiar with the "government" of bees.

The beautiful grasses have now grown tall, and stand waving their brown silky heads in the wind; or, while you gaze, a gush of light steals over them from the edge of some snowy cloud, and they seem changed, as if by the touch of a magician's wand, into a fairy forest of silver; that passes away, then the sunshine sweeps over their ranks, and they look like a large army all marching and keeping time, and shaking their plumes of gold, as

they move in measured steps. The daisies, too, are now tall, and share in the breezy sport, though overtopped by the bold and brazen buttercups, which, like ordinary and over-dressed women, push themselves forward to be seen, and conceal the sweet and bashful beauties whom we would fain behold, and who we know are near at hand.

There is a rural scene which somehow seems to linger upon our memory, at this season of the year, more than any other. We can recall it any time, from the trees that overhang the footpath and throw their shadows into the water, to the very bend the river makes as it goes broadening out between the meadows, or circles like a belt of silver around the foot of the hills, until it diminishes like a bright cloud in the distance. We have often seen it in the early morning, or in the golden noon of day, and when the blue twilight has thrown over it a shadowy veil. Here sheep bleat, and jingle their musical bells as they crop the wild thyme from the bee-haunted hillocks, or browse amongst the luxuriant clover in the neighbouring pastures;—knee-deep the plump-sided oxen graze, or, chewing the cud, lie buried among the flowers of summer. The heavy waggon goes slowly rumbling up the steep acclivity, on the summit of which stands the old weather-beaten mill, through whose rent sails we can see patches of the bright sky behind. On every hand figures are crossing the landscape. We see the angler with his wicker basket borne on the end of his folded rod, which rests upon his shoulder. We see figures moving every way.

> They come from still green nooks—woods old and hoary,
> The silent work of many a summer night,
> Ere those tall trees attain'd their giant glory,
> Or their proud tops did climb that cloudy height.
> They come from spots which the grey hawthorns light,
> Where stream-kiss'd willows make a silvery shiver.

"Who can ever fully express the pleasures of a country life?" says an old author, "with the various delights of fishing, hunting, and fowling, with guns, greyhounds, spaniels, and several sorts of nets." What refreshment it is to behold the green shades—the beauty and majesty of the tall and ancient groves; to be skilled

in the planting and training of orchards, flowers, and pot-herbs; to temper and allay these harmless enjoyments with some innocent and merry song; to ascend sometimes to the fresh and healthful hills; to descend into the bosom of the valleys, and the fragrant dewy meadows; to hear the music of birds, the murmur of bees, the falling of springs, and the pleasant discourses of the old ploughman. These are the blessings which only a countryman is ordained to, and are in vain wished for by the denizens of smoky cities; they are indeed the "sights and sounds that give delight, but hurt not."

What a different appearance the lanes and highways now present to that which they did at the beginning of Spring! You see the ploughboy seated sideways on the well-fed horse, the harness jingling at every step, as, with the whip drooping idly over his shoulder, and his napless hat placed jauntily aside, he whistles and sings, alternately, some rustic lay, about the "Jolly Ploughboy who wouldn't be a King." You see the little butcher-boy in his blue frock, followed by his dog, a villanous-looking mongrel; now urging on the three or four lambs he has driven from the white farm-house in the valley; now pausing to peep into the hedge, to see if he can discover the nest of a hedge-sparrow; anon, giving a whoop and a hallo, which is often accompanied by a heavy stone, hurled with all his might, at the flock of rooks who are busy breakfasting in the ploughed field. The cart comes rocking slowly along between the budding hedge-rows, and you see the village dame seated in front, carrying to the next town her little produce of new-laid eggs and home-made butter, and calculating to herself how long it will be before she travels on the same road with her baskets heavily laden with the first fruits of her carefully-tended garden.

Flowers are now abundant, the trees become more beautiful every day, and all the singing birds that visit us are now assembled in the fields and woods, and, as the old women in the country say, "It is almost a sin to stay in-doors, if we can get out." For this is the month which our Saxon ancestors called "Milk Month;" and, from the very name, we know that beautiful English maidens rose early in the mornings of May, and

went out into the very fields in which our country maids still sing, to milk their cows, just as the village girls do in our own day. An old grey-headed man once told me that he had heard his grandfather say, the hills which rise above Gainsborough, in Lincolnshire, were in ancient times called the Milk Hills; but they never retained that name after they were enclosed; and I have often thought that they bore the same name when my native county formed a part of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia: for I deeply love these old associations; for I knew that Alfred, when young, had marched over those very hills, when he joined his brother and the King of Mercia, and they crossed the Trent to attack the Danes, who occupied Nottingham. May, and Milk Month, and the old green Milk Hills, were always in my mind associated with Alfred and the Danes, and the destruction of Croyland Abbey, and no end of "old world histories." Nor can England furnish many a prettier little pastoral picture than a comely village girl milking a beautiful white cow under a shady tree, with a reedy pond at hand, half darkened by shadowy foliage, and before her a farm-yard—

"A green English home—a land of ancient Peace."

MAY-DAY IN THE OLDEN TIME.

"Young folk now flock out everywhere,
To gather May-bushes and scented briere."
SPENSER.

MAY was ever a merry month in the olden time.

"'Twas in the merry month of May,"

is the burthen of many an ancient ditty. Shakespeare, in one of his matchless songs, speaks of—

"Love whose month is ever May,"

for even he could find no sweeter comparison for enduring love than a never-changing season of sunny and flowery May. Love ever young—an eternal spring-tide of affection—years of flowers —one endless May hung with blossoms—so might we go on until we filled a page, then fail in conveying as much to a poetical mind as the immortal bard has done in the six brief words already quoted.

Our ancestors rose with the first dawning of day to fetch home May-boughs from the woods, with which they decorated the porches of their doors, the May-pole on the green ; and there they also made green arbours, in one of which they placed "the prettiest low-born lass," and with garlands of flowers crowned her Queen of May. When a new May-pole was wanted the lord of the soil gave the villagers permission to cut the tallest and straightest tree on the estate ; this they brought home with a team of oxen, which were dressed with flowers, while youths and maidens, bearing May-boughs, headed the procession, dancing to the simple music of pipe and tabor. Spenser, who lived in the time of Elizabeth, and, no doubt, had often seen and joined in these May-day merry-makings, tells us how the young folk flocked out to gather May-bushes and sweet-briar, with which they decorated their houses and the church pillars, and how a lusty tabourer went before them, and

> "many a hornpipe played,
> Whereto they danced each one with his maid."

Having thus decorated the houses, the church, and the May-pole, the poet then tells us that they went to the woods again to fetch home MAY, "with their musical," and that they brought May home "in a royal throne, crowned as king." By this it is clear that there was a King of May as well as a Queen of May. The May-king is only just mentioned ; there is no further allusion to him, and we are glad of it ; not so the May-queen, whom he calls the "fair one."

> "Lady Flora on whom did attend
> A fair flock of fairies and a fresh band
> Of lovely nymphs."

Then there were rustics dressed up as Robin Hood and his merry men, the hobby-horse and the dragon, Maid Marian and her attendants; and the lowliest peasants that tilled the land were for one day in the year happy. On that day Wealth and Poverty met on neutral ground, for the lord of the manor came down from his old ancestral hall, accompanied by his family, to look at, and very often join in, these May-day festivities.

It was a season of rejoicing throughout the length and breadth of the land. Nor was London a bit behind in the celebration of this ancient festival. Even in the City the tall May-pole was erected; and any one who had passed along Cornhill on May-day a few centuries ago, would have seen green arbours erected there, and huge oaken boughs hanging over the street, and the milkmaids, and all the merry old citizens, with their wives, daughters, maids, and apprentices, congregated about the May-pole, many of them dressed in old fanciful costumes, and giving themselves up to all the fun and jollity of May. But time has not preserved even the names of the mazy measures which they danced; and nearly all we know of the ancient pipe and tabor, the favourite music to which they timed their footsteps, is gathered from glancing at some scarce engraving. "Gone are the days of Gamelyn." "The May-pole," says an old writer, "was consecrated to the Goddess of Flowers, and the

garlands were left upon it the whole year, without being disturbed by any one;" and I well remember passing through a village, at the end of April, in which a tall May-pole stood, only a few years ago, and seeing the last year's garlands hanging upon it, all wan and withered, and beaten by the storms of the past winter.

In olden times it seems to have been a custom to set out for the woods soon after midnight, so that by sunrise the May-pole was felled, and the branches gathered, and the procession ready to start on its way home. In a book written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, it is stated that sometimes as many as forty yoke of oxen, each having a sweet nosegay tied to the tip of his horns, were employed to draw home the May-pole; that they covered it all over, from top to bottom, with flowers and sweet herbs, which they bound round with strings; fastening, at equal distances, cross bars upon it, to the end of which they attached garlands; and thus decorated, it was hoisted up, amid the leaping and dancing and joyous shouts of the assembled multitude.

A sum of money was allowed in those days for the erection of green arbours around the May-pole. The King and Queen, or Lord and Lady of May, as they were called, were dressed out in scarfs and ribbons, and plumes of feathers, and made as fine as it was possible to array them.

Henry the Eighth, one morning in May, attended by several of his nobles, dressed in the quaint costume of Robin Hood and his merry men, suddenly entered the chamber where the Queen and her ladies were seated, much to the alarm of the latter, who were thus taken by surprise; for it appears that the King and his followers were armed with bows and arrows, and swords and bucklers, like the outlaws of old; and fine screaming there was, no doubt, amongst the Queen and her ladies, when their apartment was broken into by a troop of armed men; who, however, instead of carrying them off, like the ancient freebooters of the forest, and keeping them prisoners under the greenwood tree until they paid down a handsome ransom in gold, contented themselves by performing several wild woodland dances, then taking their departure.

The same monarch, also, once rode out with his Queen and a whole concourse of nobles, one fine May morning, to the top of Shooters-hill, above Greenwich, and there they were received by a large troop of men, amounting to about two hundred, who were all dressed as foresters, in a costume of Kendal green, and headed by a captain, whom they called Robin Hood. These May-day foresters, dressed up for the occasion, amused their royal and noble visitors by showing them their skill in archery; and when this was over each blew his bugle-horn, and conducted the King and his train into a wood under the brow of the hill,

where a large arbour was erected of green boughs, consisting of a hall and two chambers, all decorated with flowers and sweet herbs; and here a mighty feast stood ready prepared, quite in keeping with the scene, consisting of venison, venison-pasties, and a copious supply of the blood-red wine, for such, the old ballads say, often formed the forest-banquet of Robin Hood and his merry men. A joyous May-day must that have been, presided over by the King and Queen of England; for Henry the

Eighth was then a young man, greatly beloved by his people; and in the laughing merry monarch who presided over that woodland repast, who drank deep healths to the Lord and Lady of May, and was the foremost to lead off the joyous dance in that summer hall, roofed over with green branches,—few would have traced the future murderer, or read in the outlines of the then jocund monarch the cruel beheader of so many of his wives. For the royal tiger seemed then as harmless and playful as a lamb; and those who were around him but little dreamed that his memory ever after, throughout all time, would be preserved in one of the darkest stains that ever fell, and lay an eternal blot upon the pages of history.

There was surely something highly poetical in bringing the green of old woods into the city streets—in hanging garlands of flowers between the dusty old gable-ended houses; to look down the long perspective and see huge branches over every door and window, while along the middle, high overhead, hung the May-garlands, rich with "buds of every hue," and gaudy streamers; and to see

> "Young and old come forth to play
> On the sunshine holiday,"

must have formed a beautiful picture. Yet how strange—in this holiday-loving old country, martyrs were then burning at the stake in one part of the city, while merry dancers were surrounding the May-pole in another.

Then came Cromwell and the Puritans, preaching against long love-locks and May-day games,—for which old Stubbs lost his ears and was put in the pillory,—and so they put down May-day. And the lady of the manor sat silent in her porch, looking over the landscape: but no tall May-pole again met her eye; the Roundheads and brother "Seventeenthly," with his nasal twang, held forth at the church where her ancestors slept their long sleep. At the Restoration of Charles they tried to revive May-day:

> "But she was dead and gone, lady;
> She was dead and gone."

Vain attempt! They dressed her pale corse with flowers; pale, wan, and stiff did they drag her forth; they danced around her bier, but without feeling that sunshine of the heart which had cheered them in the days of other years. In vain did the Parliament make laws to restore her,—she came not to life; in vain did they pass acts, and make a parade of her through her old haunts,—she moved not, she breathed not, for there were no longer the same sweet faces to look upon her from the old timbered-tenements as she passed—no multitude to follow her as of yore; she looked not up at the garlands which hung over her; and when they held boughs of sweet May-blossoms for her to smell of, and she smiled not, then they knew that she was dead.

MODERN MAY-DAY.

"Round the May-pole we dance and sing,
While the merry May-bells ring."
Old Song.

MAY-DAY games in modern times I have often joined in and witnessed; and there are two May-poles still standing within

the circuit of five miles of my native place,—the ancient river Trent flows between them,—one is at Martin, the other at Wheatley. There is no record of the time when May-poles did not stand in the spots these now occupy, though they have been replaced many times when the old poles showed signs of decay.

Our May-day games, beyond dancing round the May-pole, bore but little resemblance to those of an earlier day; for they were held to celebrate the Restoration of Charles II., and instead of May-blossoms we wreathed our hats with sprigs of oak, in memory of his concealment and escape. Cromwell fought some of his hardest battles on the tops of the hills that look down on the May-pole at Martin. Many of his letters—lately printed—are dated from this locality. The bog in which Cavendish was slain by Whaley is still known as Cavendish bog; it was there the first noble blood was shed at the commencement of the Civil Wars. It was ever an old Royalist neighbourhood; and that is probably why May-games are still kept up, and the day of the Restoration celebrated, and the May-pole still preserved. When young we neither thought nor cared about these matters. All we thought about was the holiday; and for my part I still wish there were more of these pilgrimages to the woods, to bring home May, than there are. The woods ought to be visited when the trees are again putting on their green garments, and when we can point out the very spots on the hedges where the hawthorn-bloom is beginning to show itself, while the daisies lie like fallen stars among the grass. We, too, set out for the woods to fell the oak branches, and many a noble bough did we bring home. Then our music was blown from bullocks' horns, and the deafening din we made was maddening to listen to. A whole herd of bullocks lowing together would have been silver music in comparison to the awful noise we made. The only poetical remnant that we retained was, we selected the prettiest cottage-girl we could find willing to accept such doubtful honour for our May-queen.

The May-boughs we brought home were suspended from windows, and fastened above the doors, so as to form leafy porches;

others were bound together in the form of arches, and stuck into the ground at regular distances—the openings between being filled with lesser branches and trailing flowers, until a beautiful green arbour was formed. At the end of the arbour, elevated above the rude seats, was a rustic throne, covered with flowers

of every hue: this was erected for our May-queen. Her royal robes generally consisted of a neat white dress, with a pink sash round her waist, and on her head a crown of flowers: sometimes —but let it only be whispered—she ran home, and made a hearty dinner off bacon and spring-cabbage, then hurried back, and

again ascended her flowery throne. Ladders were then reared against the May-pole, and the village girls brought out the garlands which they had woven of flowers and gaudy ribands; and many a boy gave up his string of birds' eggs to decorate it. Old and young assembled upon the green; and many a dim eye glistened with joy, when they saw the garlands wave in the sunshine, and heard the laugh and shout and song mingle with bursts of music. Then we commenced dancing, forming ourselves into a circle, and wheeling rapidly round the May-pole. Hand in hand we flew in giddy mazes, the flowers trembling in the long locks of our fair partners, as their measured steps bounded upon the greensward. Then from the ale-houses large flags waved out; that at the King's Head being, of course, right royal, while the Radical who kept the beer-shop hung a banner out with some saucy motto, telling how little respect he entertained for the "divinity of kings." The oak-apples on the great branches were gilded to look like gold,—and very pretty was the appearance of this deceit to the eye: and I often thought there was a great resemblance between these tinselled gall-apples and the rewards bestowed on the loyal Cavaliers after the Restoration, who had fought and lost their fortunes for King Charles,—

> "Outsides full of promised pleasure,
> Insides bitter beyond measure."

Still there is something beautiful and poetical in these fast-fading old customs: they at least serve to show us that our forefathers were great lovers of the country, and rose with the first grey dawn of morning, while yet the dew hung heavily on the unopened flowers, to "do observance to the May." It was some such love for the beautiful that induced us to follow this ancient example,—a wish to look at May as she stood, fresh and rosy on the green hill-tops, just as she had done when our forefathers went out to welcome her home with pipe and tabor and merry dance. For we, too, like them, had our Queen of Flowers, sitting in a green arbour, the same blue sky overhead,—the whisper of leaves, the tinkling of streams, and the singing of birds, all unaltered since they held their ancient merry-makings. And

Nature will ever have "hearts that love her" while flowers wave and streams run; but the rough antics and broad jests that shook the honest sides of our simple-hearted ancestors would not be tolerated now. The only representatives we have in our city-streets of the King and Queen of May are a sweep and sweepess, and London sees no other sign of the May-days that have departed never more to return. Our modern May-games, as still kept up, have no picturesque dragon, nor knight, nor jolly friar,—nothing to recall castle and abbey, nor that old poetical age which seems to us like a departed dream, though there was, no doubt, as much hard work-a-day reality about the common objects of life then as there is now.

As for our modern May-day, it was generally spent in innocent amusements,—such as singing, dancing, love-making, and feasting; and sometimes, when there was a little jealousy and a little too much to drink, why, it wound up with a fight or two.

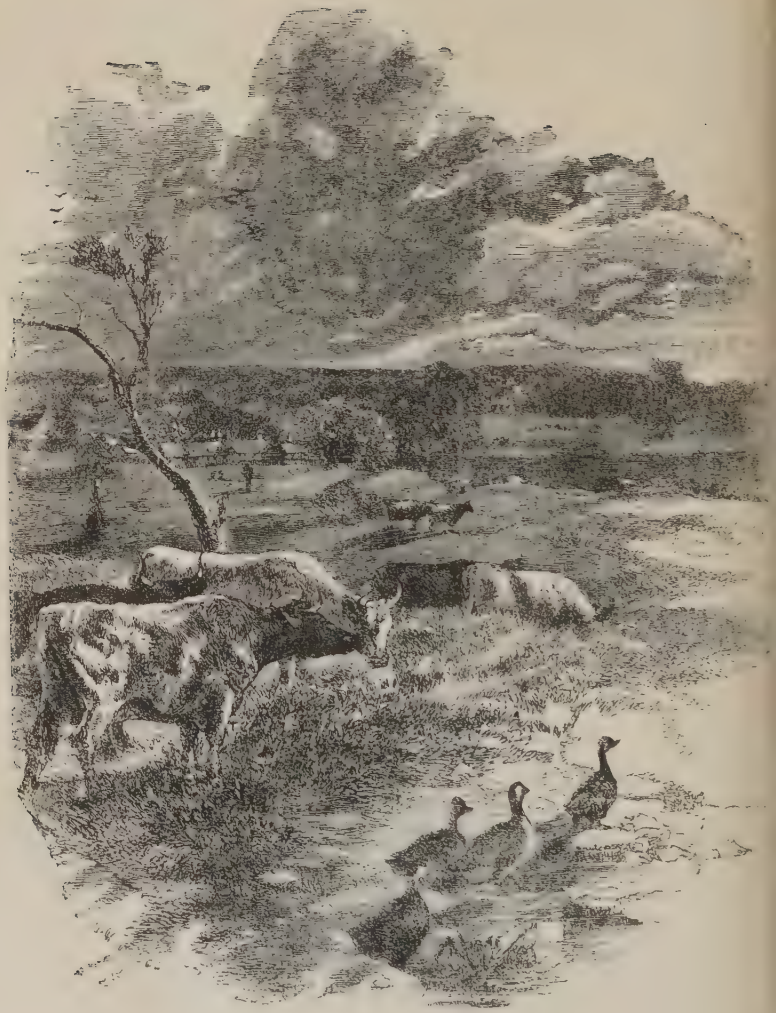
There is a beautiful poem by Herrick, entitled "Corinna's Going a-Maying," a portion of which we give as a fit ending to Spring and May-day:—

"Get up, get up for shame! the blooming Morn
Upon her wings presents the God unshorn!
See how Aurora throws her fair
Fresh-quilted colours through the air!—
Get up, sweet slug-a-bed! and see
The dew bespangling herb and tree.
Each flower has wept and bow'd toward the east
Above an hour since, yet you not dress'd—
Nay, not so much as out of bed,
When all the birds have matins said
And sung their thankful hymns: 'tis sin—
Nay, profanation, to keep in,
Whereas a thousand virgins on this day
Spring sooner than the lark, to fetch in May.

"There's not a budding boy or girl this day
But is got up and gone to bring in May.
A deal of youth ere this has come
Back, and with whitethorn laden home:
Some have despatch'd their cakes and cream
Before that we have ceased to dream;

And some have wept, and woo'd, and plighted troth,
And chose their priest, ere we can cast off sloth:
Many a green gown has been given;
Many a kiss, both odd and even;
Many a glance, too, has been sent
From out the eye, love's firmament.

Come, let us go, while we are in our prime,
And take the harmless folly of the time;
We shall grow old apace and die
Before we know our liberty.
Our life is short, and our days run
As fast away as does the sun:
And as a vapour, or a drop of rain,
Once lost, can ne'er be found again,
So when or you or I are made
A fable, song, or fleeting shade,
All love, all liking, all delight
Lies drown'd with us in endless night."
Then while time serves, and we are but decaying,
Come, my Corinna! come, let's go a-Maying."



SUMMER TIME.

SUMMER TIME.

SUMMER TIME — WOODS IN SUMMER — THE WOODBINE — CATTLE IN WATER — BYGONE SUMMER TIMES—SABBATH SILENCE—CITY CHILDREN IN THE COUNTRY.

LONG-LEAVED Summer time, as our old poets loved to call it, has again arrived, with its pleasant smell of bean-fields in bloom, and hay-fields in swathe, and redolent of that fragrance which the tedded grass only throws out, from among thousands of expiring flowers, which the pitiless mower cut down while they were in the full perfection of their beauty. Pity that it is so; that even the queenly rose dies, as Shakespeare tells us, as soon as it is fully blown. Hill, and wood, and valley, have now put on their Summer raiment, their new dresses for the season, which look fresher and more beautiful at the opening of Summer time,

than they will do after they have been soiled and darkened by a month's wear. How I love this bursting into Summer—this holiday costume of the earth, attired, as she now is, in her robes of green, with flounces of flowers trailing about her perfumed feet;—to see her waving her green garlands over hill and valley, and bending the long grass as she passes—to see the gorgeous carpet of flowers spread for her in forest wastes, and on brown moorlands, where all the rest of the year the ground looks bare and barren—to hear her gentle breathing in the rustling of the young corn, and smell her perfumed breath in a thousand blossoms, while her blue eyes are mirrored in every river and stream we look into. She whispers to the leaves as she passes, and they dance upon their branches with delight; the silvery willow bows gracefully before her, and the scarlet poppy waves its velvet banner as she passes, while every bush and tree seem to send forth a song.

What is there so pleasant as to enter an old wood on a sultry Summer's day, and to throw oneself at the root of some goodly tree on the cool moss or long grass! Perchance a brook murmurs at our feet, welling away between its shelving banks, now in sunshine, now in shade, while myriads of lovely flowers bend over it, gazing upon their own beautiful shadows, and arching their slender stems as if to kiss their own images in the clear water. How delightful to ramble from glen to glen, from thicket to thicket! How like Jason we seem, threading such leafy labyrinths! What if he bore off the golden fleece—cannot we carry home the golden saxifrage, with its rich-wrought flowers? Poetry—nothing but dreamy poetry seems to haunt us here. Hark! heard you Ophelia singing, "Oh willow! willow!" No—it was but the dashing water. Surely yonder is Una leading her milk-white lamb! Passed she not the glade? 'Twas but a sunbeam that fell for a moment upon the white trunk of a noble tree, then vanished. But did not Gurth the swineherd blow his horn, and summon his dog Fangs to drive the herd to Cedric's castle? or did he laugh at Wamba's jest? 'Twas but the woodpecker that sent his merry laugh through the greenwood. Hark! it "came as near as near could be"—

was it not Geraldine complaining to Christabel that they had "bound her to a palfrey white?" 'Twas merely the wood-pigeon

cooing to its distant mate. Delusive poetry!—dreamy old wood! We will shut our eyes, and fancy we hear nymph and

faun, and dryad stealing lightly past, as if afraid to waken the flowers.

There are no places like woods to sit down in in Summer time, and enjoy a volume of true poetry; with Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, or Milton, for companionship, the intellectual wanderer is never alone. Woods are the great cathedrals which God himself has erected, and there are moods of mind when a holier religion seems to reign around these green solitudes than in temples erected by the hand of man. The deep roaring of the wind through the massy branches, seems at times scarcely an earthly sound, and there is a stir in the low rustling leaves, as of

"Airy tongues that syllable men's names."

The pillars hewn and carved and upreared by man, look not more reverential than an aisle of ancient oaks, such as we have seen in the forest of Sherwood, about Birkland, tossing their gnarled and weather-stained branches above our heads; while high above their topmost branches were seen little morsels of sky,—the starry roof, which the Most High had hung there with His own Almighty hand. No organ ever fell upon mortal ear with more solemn or sacred sounds, than we have heard the wind make in those forest solitudes, when playing upon the organ-pipes which rear up everywhere in that great solemn Land of Ancient Trees.

How often have we inhaled the fragrance of the woodbine, while lying in "idlesse," as we do now, then rising, plunged deep into the entangling underwood in search of it, which at last we have found coiled about the stem of some goodly tree, that was wreathed all over to its bottomest branches with these sweet trumpet-shaped flowers.

How oft the bees with humming march
Through flowery towns go sounding on their way
And cross the red-streaked woodbine's sun-stained arch!

What lovely images the woodbine has furnished for our poets, through its entwining round and clinging to the stem it decorates. What a charm there is in the word "Wood" to a lover of the country; he almost fancies that he feels the cool air playing

upon his cheek when it is uttered, and hears the low fluttering of the long green leaves.

The pale gold of the woodbine, and the pearly blossoms of the trailing bramble, mingle with the drooping crimson of the foxglove; while the dazzling sunshine of the gorse throws its beautiful masses of colour upon the green of the underwood, and lies in bright relief beneath the vaulted gloom of the overhanging branches; and sometimes you hear the lowing of cattle amid the deep umbrage, or the jingling of sheep-bells in the remote dis-

tance; sounds that come like a cheerful voice amid the silence and solitude of the forest, and which you listen to while lying

> "Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out
> Upon the brook that brawls along the wood."

Step wherever we may we find that Summer has thrown open her green doors, that the trees and hedges are hung with the most beautiful foliage, and the fields covered with a rich variety of flowers; and we feel that Earth can never look more beautiful than she does now. In the morning, the dew hangs upon the

blossoms; in the evening, the air is filled with the perfume of flowers, as if day were too short for them to throw out all their sweetness.

The early garden fruits are now in great perfection—the glossy black currants that hang like rounded beads beneath their covering of fragrant leaves; the huge gooseberries that can scarcely contain themselves for very ripeness within their glittering green, or red and hairy husks; red and white currants that hang like coral and pearl, pendent and gracefully from their broad-leaved boughs; and strawberries that hide under every leaf they can find to shelter them, are all ripe, and ready for the luscious banquet-table of Summer.

Now one of those rural pictures which artists in almost all ages have tried their hands upon may frequently be seen where a clump of trees overhangs a pond, a stream, or some quiet shadowy pool which the sunbeams can scarcely penetrate. In

such a spot may a group of cattle of various colours frequently be seen, standing almost motionless, excepting for the lashing of their tails to and fro, to drive away the swarm of buzzing insects which are incessantly hovering around and alighting upon the horned herd.

It is an agreeable sight to see cattle, during the heat of the day in Summer, thus standing in the middle of ponds, or in rivers, where they enjoy the coolness of the water. There they ruminate and solace themselves, some standing belly-deep, while others only venture up to the middle of their legs: they seem to wear, also, at such times "knowing" looks—one possesses the gravity of a judge; while another has something lighter in its countenance, more like the thoughtlessness of youth. The cows remind you of serious old age, the calves are as restless as boys, and the sleek oxen appear as contented as well-fed aldermen after a civic feast. Objects like these have formed favourite subjects for landscape-painters in all ages, and the groupings of cattle, with their shadows upon the water, often are the finest portions of their pictures. Besides, they are the poetry of still-life, and sometimes stand in such pictorial positions as to render the scene imperfect without their presence, finely breaking the dense shadows of the overhanging trees, which sleep upon the silvery surface. Gisborne has described such a scene very naturally in his "Forest Walks"—

> "Behold yon pool, by unexhausted springs
> Still nurtured, draw the multitude that graze
> The plains adjacent! On the bank, worn bare
> And printed with ten thousand steps, the colts
> In shifting groups combine, or, to the brink
> Descending, dip their pasterns in the wave.
> Bolder, the horned tribes, far from the shore,
> Immerge their chests; and while the hungry swarm
> Now soars aloof, now resolute descends,
> Lash their tormented sides, by insects pierced."

Who that has attained mature years can look back without recalling the pleasant days in the Summer times of old, when we wandered forth with those we loved—alas! it may be with those "whose place knoweth them no more for ever." If a man,

and thou sittest down under the green boughs, and recallest the spot where thou didst woo and win her, in the Summer time, thou wilt again hear the murmuring of the waters, and see her form once more mirrored on its surface, even as it was when thou didst sit beside her on the bank, pouring tender vows into her heart, while that heart beat like the bosom of a bird amongst the blossoms which overhang its callow young. If thou art a lady, thou wilt remember how tenderly he led thee by the hand through the deep underwood, lifting up every hooked bramble and straggling thorn, lest thou mightest stumble ; and, where cool shadows sheltered thee from the hot sun of Summer, he made thee a seat of the rustling fern, just where a branching hazel, overtopped by a giant elm, drooped over thy beauty ; and how here thou didst, with blushing cheeks and downcast eyes, swear to become his for ever. That day thou canst never forget ; that scene has floated between thy dreams and heaven thousands of times, even to the very quivering of the sunlight through the leaves as it played upon his cheek, when he clasped thee (nothing loth) in his arms, and called Heaven to sanctify his vow.

"Our summer sun may squander
A blaze serener, grander ;
Our autumn beam may, like a dream
Of heaven, die calm away ;
But, no—let life before us
Bring all the light it may,
'Twill shed no lustre o'er us
Like that first trembling ray."—MOORE.

Who lives in that dear old cottage now ? What face peeps between that leaden diamond-shaped lattice round which the roses climbed to peep at thy beauty ? Is the little bed of mignonette still cultivated that grew below, on which the small gravel often fell when we threw it on the moonlit casement, nor ceased until thy beauty, like a reflecting star, appeared between the envious blinds ? Oh, Love ! Oh, Time ! Oh, Death ! A trembling hand parts the thick sweetbriar over a daisy-covered grave, and below sleeps all that was once so lovely. We lingered not behind to weep, but, with staff in hand, wandered many a lonely mile among the ruins of castles, over which the wall-

flowers waved, by the shadows of mighty cathedrals, among the crumbling monuments of forgotten pride, and returned, after many months, sad but calm, half broken-hearted, but resigned, burying ourselves for days in the bowers of the Muses, until they listened to our low lispings, and hearkened, with heads aside,

while we told them all our sorrows in song. And now the image of that old church, under the shadow of which thou sleepest, stands out prominently from among the pictures which ever hang in the great Gallery of Memory—pictures solemn and sad, bright and cheerful, just as the "inward eye" is sad or

bright, when gazing thitherward. Nor can we ever forget the Sabbath silence that reigned around when last we saw thy lowly grave.

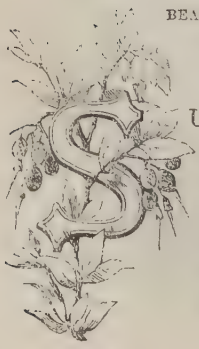
How calm and beautiful is the country on a Sunday in Summer time! The very village seems asleep, and a dreaming quiet broods over the fields, unlike that of any other day. The sounds of labour are hushed—the blacksmith's forge is silent—the wheel of the old water-mill is still as the shadow it throws on the mill-dam. No sounds are heard but what Nature herself makes in the rustling of the leaves, the murmur of the stream—which seems more audible on account of the surrounding silence: while the drone of the bees, and the voices of the few birds that now sing, break not the Sabbath silence. Even the sweet sound of the village bells, heard from the old grey tower, falls on the ear subdued and solemn; and the moving groups, on their way to church, seem "images of rest;" and when the shades of evening gather over such a scene, how naturally the thoughts turn to the dead who sleep their last sleep in the green churchyard.

A wanderer in the country not only finds pleasure in the beauties of Nature, but feels a delight in witnessing the enjoyment of others, and in none more than seeing the children of the poor—those who have about them the stamp of city-courts and crowded alleys—running for once free and happy along the green lanes and over the pleasant field-paths. It makes a kind-hearted man sigh to think how those little creatures, ordained naturally to be happy, are shut up in stifling rooms, or left to wander at will through the hot and suffocating streets, in too many instances without any one to care either for their moral or bodily wants. Such have we sometimes had around us for the distance of a mile or two. They were rummaging every bank, peeping into every hedge, and plucking every flower they came near; they seemed to run over as much ground as a dog: they were never still—but here, there, and everywhere; ever discovering some object, new and wonderful to them, such as they had never before beheld in their city alleys; a molehill prettily marked, or a little clump of moss, were marvels in their eyes. Then, what a long consultation would there be at the door of

some road-side ale-house. They perhaps mustered three or four pence amongst the whole half-dozen; the hungriest were advocates for all penny loaves—the extravagant for a pennyworth of cheese. What a half-bashful joy played about their little dirty faces, if any good-natured pedestrian stepped in, and, by contributing a few halfpence, settled the dispute, and for once allowed them to revel in (to them) a rich banquet of bread and cheese. City-bred although they were, there would be a look of mingled gratitude and delight, which proclaimed, in unmistakeable though silent language, that those young hearts were not yet wholly corrupted, but that there lay the soil which might be made either to bear poisonous weeds or goodly fruit. In a city street their very language might perhaps shock the stranger; but here they are often met with in their best and gentlest moods. We have somewhere said that God still adorns the earth with trees and flowers as beautiful as ever waved in Eden, as if to prove to man that, however low he may have fallen, the lovely objects of field and wood have not degenerated; but that the rose is still as sweet, and the leaves as beautiful and green as they were before man fell from his high estate. All remains as lovely as when first fashioned by the great Creator; and nothing ever pained us more than the great sweeping Enclosure Act. It seemed as if the last link was severed that united man to the wonderful works of God—that he was no longer to "consider the lilies of the field, how they grow," or revel in the perfume of sweet flowery Summer time.

SUMMER FLOWERS.

BEAUTY OF SUMMER—BUTTERFLY AND FLOWERS—ROSES AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS—ABUNDANCE OF SUMMER FLOWERS—CHILDREN IN THE WOODS—WANE OF SUMMER FLOWERS—BEAUTY OF FIELDS.



SUMMER now reigns in the full womanhood of her beauty; the roses of her lips now pout with gushing sweetness, and the sun has stained her cheeks with the richest crimson of heaven. Alas! her hair is wreathed with the blossoms of her last choicest flowers, and when these are faded, she will look

round for her place of rest; for she knows that when she has attained the perfection of her beauty, she must die. All her sweet flowers will droop, and fall down to form her dying couch; and the birds that sung joyfully in her presence, will hurry away to far-off shores, as soon as they find that she is no more. Nature will grieve when Summer dies, with all her flowers; but it will only be for a little time that she will pass away, that she will lay down as it were in a trance, with closed eyes, as if she could not bear to see her flowers perish. When her time comes she will awake, and the birds will meet her

> At the same place,—
> She'll look as lovely as of old,
> For there will spring another race
> Of flowers from out the upturn'd mould,
> Where she lay dead a year ago.

But now Summer reigns in the pride of her beauty; for as yet there is no sign of decay around her, nothing but sunshine, and song, and sweet perfumes, as if all Nature was holding one great holiday, which the sun came every day to join in, and shone his strongest to make everything happy.

On every hand we hear the birds singing; on whichever side we look we see the flowers in bloom; the bee and the butterfly hasten from blossom to blossom: the one slow and steady in his movements, scarcely leaving a bell in the neighbourhood in which he murmurs unvisited, seeming to know that Summer will not last long, and that he must gather honey while the flowers blow and the sun shines; the other goes jerking his wings from bud to bud, and without any aim or object save to wile away the passing hours, alights and swings himself just so long as he pleases, as if he knows that his reign will soon be over, and that, when the flowers are gone, his little day will be ended, and the part he has played in the masque of Summer forgotten. The poet Spenser has painted the life of a butterfly visiting the Summer flowers, as one unceasing round of pleasure. He says:—

> "What more felicity can fill a creature
> Than to enjoy delight with liberty,

And to be lord of all the works of Nature?
To reign in the air, from earth to highest sky—
To feed on flowers, and weeds of glorious feature?
To take whatever thing doth please the eye?
Who rests not pleased with such happiness,
Will worthy be to taste of wretchedness."

Roses are now in full bloom, the sweetest of all England's flowers. What thoughts and associations flow through the mind while gazing upon these perfumed vases of beauty! We conjure up the lovely form of Eve in the garden of Eden,

"Veil'd in a cloud of fragrance, where she stood,
Half-spied, so thick the roses blushing round
About her glow'd."

Or we turn back to old Chaucer, and think of the fair Emilie rising ere it is day; and after dressing herself and binding the long hair that fell upon her shoulders with a riband, walking into the garden, to sport and trip along "in the cool of day;" and

"At every turn she took she made a stand,
And thrust among the thorns her little hand
To draw a flower; and every flower she drew
She shook the stalk, and brush'd away the dew."

Perhaps a skylark may be singing high in the heaven, while we are gazing upon a rose in some quiet old garden; and how easy it will be to fancy that sound the voice of Emilie singing and carolling out "so clear!" Or we may dream a moment of Herrick and his Julia; and how the roses once met in parliament in Julia's breast, and were voted the sweetest of flowers, and, next to lovely woman, were the most beautiful of all God's works. Or learn how

"Roses at first were white,
Till they could not agree
Whether my Sappho's breast
Or they more white should be.
But being vanquisht quite,
A blush their cheeks bespread;
Since which, believe the rest,
The roses first came red."

Or we are borne away by Shakespeare into the Temple Garden, and pluck a rose with Plantagenet or Somerset, and are led to

muse upon the battles which were fought in honour of the roses. Or we dream of the lovely Juliet leaning from her window in the

moonlight, and musing upon her Romeo's name, and thinking that

> "which we call a rose,
> By any other name would smell as sweet."

"The poetry of earth is never dead;" and thoughts and feelings that have long slumbered in the bosom are often awakened when we gaze upon a flower. It may be "a tone of music, summer's eve or spring"—a breath of wind, or any slight object in Nature, that will touch the heart while walking in the country, and call forth "thoughts too deep for tears." There is a spirit in the silent haunts of Nature, in the voiceless valley, and the deep and still woods, that holds communion with the soul. It is in that hour when man,

> "Exempt from public haunt,
> Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

The beauty of flowery fields does not always stir up the mind to a sense of delight; for there are seasons when the whole array of painted meadows looks sad, under the gloomy influence of cloudy skies. Even roses may become melancholy emblems, when we think of those whom we have loved, who were fair and beautiful, and gave greater delight to the eye and heart than we can ever again feel from gazing upon those regal flowers.

But Summer has again thrown open her green doors, and we already scent her perfumes, and hear the singing of her birds and the falling of her cool waters, and feel playing around us ten thousand refreshing fans which she has formed out of the long green leaves.

There is now a purple flush of wild thyme on the tiny mole-hills, around which the bees keep up an incessant humming while gathering their load of honey; the dark green heaths are also beginning to show their flowers, though it will be towards the end of Summer before the solitary spots in which they love best to blow are all ablaze with their crimson bells. Hedges and banks, ditches and the little dusty patches of green that lie

along every road-side, are now covered with Summer flowers. High above all towers the great white bindweed, while convolvuluses of many colours not only garland the hedgerows, but run wild among the grasses; the pale pink one almost as plentiful as daisies in Spring, and yielding a most pleasant perfume. Then there are great patches of the yellow charlock to be seen, looking in the distance like fields of gold, along which sometimes runs a rich border of scarlet poppies, that almost make the eyes ache, if they dwell too long on such vast masses of gaudy colours. An agreeable relief is the blue succory, as it shows like a break of clear sky amid the burning sunset of scarlet and golden flowers, for such seem the flash and blaze of the charlock and corn-poppies.

Tallest of flowers standing beside the hedges and in the woods is the stately foxglove, which neither craves support from bush nor tree, but firmly holds its own with its feet anchored in the earth, and its fiery bloom hanging out like crimson lamps in the air. But look within, to see how beautifully every bell is spotted, and then you will confess that however great a love you may have for the snapdragon, with its finger-shaped petals, it can boast of no such delicate markings as this denizen of the wilderness. Another beautiful flower, too often overlooked only because it is common, is the wood-betony, with its rose-coloured bloom rising stage above stage, and giving quite a warm flush to the green and shady places it decorates. But sweetest of all field-flowers, and not surpassed even by the May-blossoms, is the meadow-sweet, which carries a fragrance of its own, that bears no resemblance to any bud that blows. A Londoner need wander no further than to the water-courses about Beckenham (close by the Sydenham railway-station), or down to the rivulets that water Carshalton, to see this sweet flower in perfection, and sniff his fill of its delicate perfume; and if he never inhaled its aroma before, he will feel thankful for smelling, once in his life, such a perfume as was never excelled, even when long-haired Eve wandered in innocence through Eden, and angels alighted with "subsiding wings" amongst its flowers. Ladies' bed-straw, with its rich golden tufts, and the centaury, that throws out a

SUMMER-FLOWERS.

of star-shaped pink flowers, may now be found in bloom among the Summer Flowers.

A rare harvest of flowers do all these yield for the country children to gather; and you may now meet with them in lonely lanes and shadowy woods, not the least afraid of losing their way, but singing in concert with the birds, where the wood-stream joins in chorus, like that never-to-be-forgotten stream of Coleridge's :—

> "A hidden brook
> In the leafy month of June,
> That to the sleeping woods all night
> Singeth a quiet tune."

And there, as Summer advances, the broad fern arrests the eye with its russet-coloured leaves; and in shady places of the deep underwood we find rich groups of fungi and agarics, stained with the deepest orange, rich crimson, gold of the clearest hue, spotted and sprinkled and starred with silver, and clothed in gaudier colours than the richest flower that ever opened its fragrant petals to the sunshine. Others, again, lie like huge snow-balls among the grass, as if some tiny urchin had rolled them there on the previous winter, and the giant bulk, which far outgrew his strength, had not yet melted away.

The autumn-crocus, which our ancestors set so much store by, as it supplied them with the saffron they used in dyeing, is now in bloom; and, in moist, shady places, the wild-mint may be found, with its round and lilac-coloured flowers, which fill the air around with an overpowering fragrance, and are musical with the hum of hundreds of congregated bees. The lavender, also, puts forth its twilight blossoms, looking, when in flower, like a vast moor-land covered with heather, over which the last sun-ray is fading before the night drops down; for so does the sombre purple blend with the pinky hues, that throw a shifting and uncertain light over a lavender-field in full bloom. By the dry banks where the little green grasshopper still "chithers," the blue and graceful harebell now blows; its delicate and azure cups trembling at every dallying breeze that breathes, as if they were ever afraid of being torn away from the fragile stem. On the

waysides we meet with the large ox-eyed daisy, that grows side by side with the gaudy poppy, and where, saving the wild tansy, no other green or flowery thing shoots up amid the arid and broken ground. Wherever we look, we see the tall golden-rod, baring its yellow flowers to the sunshine; and, below, the beautiful eye-bright, nestling like an insect among the grass, its white wings interlaced with streaks of green and gold. In the cornfields we find the rich red-coloured pheasant's-eye, which our great-grandmothers called rose-a-ruby, and considered one of the most beautiful of Summer's last flowers. By the sides of streams we find the arrow-head, gazing tranquilly at its own shadow in the water, as if, like Narcissus of old, it was never weary of looking upon its three-leaved white-pearled flower, with its eye of purple and gold. Our old favourite, the pimpernel, is also still out, counting the hours, which the forget-me-not lingers behind to cheer with its beauty as they pass. In the hedgerows we find the green and crimson berries of the woody nightshade, hanging in bright and gushing clusters among the purple flowers which are still in bloom; while the ruddy hawthorn-berries begin to appear, as if May had carried with her all her delicate pearls, and Autumn, in remembrance of her loveliness, had hung the bowers her beauty once adorned, with pendant rubies.

But we are advancing faster than the flowers are appearing, for it is still high Summer everywhere; in the deep woods and beneath the shady hedgerows, in dell and dingle, where a twilight reigns at noon-day, her warm breath has penetrated and her growing showers fallen. Wherever a root lay buried, or a branch was hidden, there she has been, and hung them with leaves and flowers; for it mattered not to her whether or not the eye of man fell upon her beautiful workmanship. There the red foxgloves hang out their speckled bells; while, overhead, the woodbine throws its trailing banners of floating green, and pale and ruddy gold. By the water-course, we still inhale the fragrance of the meadow-sweet, that mingled aroma of hawthorn buds and new-mown hay—for such is the perfume with which this Queen of the Meadows enriches the passing breeze. Then, over all, comes that drowsy overpowering fragrance from a bean-field in

full blossom, the very smell of which conjures up images of the fields of Enna and Proserpine among the flowers, which,

affrighted, she let fall. On the banks and the hedges, the gracefully-formed convolvulus still climbs and twines; and, in the fields, up the tender grasses, the same beautiful flower rears its pinky head, as it enwreathes the stems, and throws out its delicate scent. The briony, too, throws round everything it comes near its glossy trails, winding quite a contrary way to the convolvulus, as one turns towards the sun, and the other from it. Wherever the eye alights, the ground is covered with flowers, many of them entirely different from what we saw enamelling the banks and waysides at Spring, and looking as if Summer was at a loss which to wear upon her brow, amid such a profusion of beautiful wreaths;—sometimes growing in spots where

> The silence there by such a chain is bound
> That even the busy woodpecker makes stiller by her sound
> The inviolable quietness—

little nooks, where, above our heads, the grey clouds sail away to the far-off hills, as if they were hurrying off to other worlds beyond the horizon, and had only deigned to look down for a moment upon the lovely valley, in which we were idly resting, while looking at the flowers; spots which seem shut out from the world, as if the silence were never disturbed by anything louder than the murmuring of the stream, the rustling of the leaves, or the faint low whispering of the russet-coloured grasses, —where green things only grow and wave. Excepting in the cool morning hours, or when the evening shadows begin to lengthen, we hear not that woodland burst which went sounding through the flower-opening April and the hawthorn-breathing May; for in the burning noons of Summer,

> "No warbling tongue
> Then talked unto the echo of the groves,
> Only the curled streams soft chidings kept,
> And little gusts, that from the green leaves swept
> Dry Summer's dust, in fearful whispering stirred,
> As loth to waken any warbling bird."

Only the grasshopper—that "sweet prophet of the Summer," as old Anacreon called it—keeps up "a coil" among the green leaves that shelter it when

> "All the birds are faint with the hot sun,
> And hide in cooling trees."

The blossoms on the fruit trees are now daily losing their beauty, and some of them have entirely vanished; but the fields never wear so delightful an aspect as now. Tens of thousands of rich kingcups are in full splendour, glittering in the meadows, as if they were paved with flowers of gold, and will continue so until the scythe sweeps down all their beauty. The red poppy is in bloom, and the monkey-poppy still continues in flower; but the peonies are decaying, and the tulips losing their gaudy colours. Pinks are also in flower, and the yellow day-lilies have begun to blow; the splendid orange-lily, too, opens its flowers; several species of the garden-iris are also in flower; and the yellow flag unfurls its golden bloom by the sides of ponds and streams, over which it bends, gazing on its own lovely shadow. Sweet is the perfume that now floats over the blossoming clover-fields, which spread out like costly silken carpets enwrought with rich flowers of white and purple; while a thousand bees murmur over their honeyed bells, and fill the air with drowsy music, scattering a slumberous repose on every side. Bunyan must have been wandering over a clover-field in blossom when he imagined the perfumed dreamy air that floated over his enchanted land; and Thomson has thrown a portion of its sleepiness over his Castle of Indolence, making it an eternal season between May and June, "Half prankt with Spring, with Summer half embrowned;" a kind of lazy climate, where no man could work, nor yet muster energy enough to play. But when a bean-field chances to be near at hand, then indeed is the odour overpowering; and should an oak throw out its broad branches close by, springing up above some hedge laden with woodbine and wild roses, and a dreaming poet chance to go that way, he is pretty sure to throw himself down under the tree. The field waving with its rich flowers, and clover lands in full bloom—the very wind lazy under its load of fragrance, a drowsy murmur of bees singing or humming as they pass to and fro, the branches of the oak just stirring, the long grass giving half a nod, a bird or two making half a note, your own eyes half closed, and a sleepy brook that almost hesitates before it passes over a pebble—(so low is its voice as scarcely

to be heard)—these form the real luxuries of country indolence.

Beside the flowers, the corn-fields begin to attract the eye, for the rye wears that pale yellow look which tells that it will soon be ready for reaping, while the oats are whitening, and shake

their beautiful pendants in the wind, like thousands of little pairs of earrings. The wheat and barley have lost all their spring-green, and put on that darker hue which shows that the golden grain will before long burst through the tender sheath, and soon be ripe for harvest.

But while the fields are so beautiful, and the Summer flowers in bloom, the longest day has come and gone. It passes away, and we hardly bestow a serious thought upon it; never looking back to think of the days as they are now, and what they were in the middle of December, when, instead of closing the shutters and lighting the candles by four o'clock, we have now at the same hour the sun high up amid the blue of heaven, and five long hours of daylight behind, before the purple twilight drops down. Yet these changes strike us not unless we look back, so almost imperceptibly do the days "put out" and "draw in," stealing like sleep upon us unaware; for so little heed do we take of the changes the seasons bring, that light and darkness flit by like the passing moment, unheeded as a stream into which we throw a flower that will be carried away, and lost in the engulphing ocean.

SUMMER IN THE FIELDS.

THE MOWER—HAY-MAKING—SHEEP-WASHING AND SHEEP-SHEARING FEAST—A GIPSY ENCAMPMENT.

THE village streets are now nearly emptied of their inhabitants; you may knock at a dozen doors, and not find a soul at home; for they are all off, either to play or work in the Summer fields, where there is hay-making, sheep-washing, and sheep-shearing, and no end of out-of-door employment going on. The little tailor is there, for he knows the ale-barrel will not be spared; and the cobbler finds his seat too hot for him when he thinks of the cool watercourse where they are busy sheep-washing. As for their wives, they are

out hay-making; and where the mothers are, there the children will be, in spite of sleeveboard or straps, for nothing will keep them out of the fields in Summer. Pass whoever you may, they are journeying in the direction of the fields, for all business is now carried on there; this one is carrying a bottle of beer to the mowers, that one a basket of bread and cheese; the boy has been for a new stone to sharpen the scythe, the girl for some tobacco for her father. How sun-tanned they are, how tired they seem; and yet, let a young bird or a gaudy butterfly come near, and both boy and girl will be ready for a long mile run.

As we draw nearer to the fields our ear is first arrested by the sharp "rasp, rasp" of the mower, which tells that the work of destruction has begun, and that he is again whetting his scythe to make further havoc among the grass and flowers; for the grasses never look more beautiful than they do now, many of them drooping and rising in the richest forms of silken tracery, plumed and pendant, here running out into the form of a beautiful branch, there resembling the most graceful foliage; and when brought home and examined apart from the gaudier-looking flower, many will be astonished at the silken beads of the graceful quaking-grass, and the floating plumage of the downy feather-grass, and many another which for delicacy of tint, and beauty of form, are worthy of being placed beside the fairest flowers that grace our garden borders. At every sweep from the sinewy arms and sharp scythe of the sun-burnt mower, we see thousands of heads of elegant grasses and beautiful flowers laid prostrate. Swathe upon swathe is turned over, and through the fallen and bladed grass peep the golden buttercup and the spotted cowslip, the rounded crimson of the clover and the snow-white rim of the daisy, and long before the evening sun has sunk down into the west, their beauty has perished for ever. Onward goes the destroyer, like death, with his scythe in his hand, hewing down all he approaches without distinction, and leaving them ridge upon ridge to be piled into windrows, until the field is at last filled with rounded hillocks, graves under which the flowers of Spring lie dead and buried; but still throwing a rich perfume

upon the air, which tells how fair and sweet were those perfumed daughters of the earth and sky that sleep beneath.

What havoc the mower has made—what hidden homes he has laid bare; haunts of the long-tailed field-mouse, and nests of birds that love to build and hide in the grass, all these his sharp scythe has unroofed; and while we look on we muse and exclaim, "Man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; his days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth; for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone!"

Hay-making is both a pleasant and healthful occupation ;—it is the very life of an English summer. The sweet smell of the new hay excels almost every other fragrance, as it is tossed about in the sunshine, to allow the drying wind to pass through it. It is also a labour of pleasure: where will you find happier faces than in the hay-field? The honest farmer is there, moving like a father amongst his children, smiling occasionally at the innocent jest, or prophesying the wedding-day between Jane and John, who are following each other with the rake and fork. Then there is all the village gossip,—what hours it takes telling! And there is the blushing damsel with her gown thrown off, and stripped to the stays, showing all the symmetry of her fine figure while raking round the haycock which her lover has reared, forgetful of the heat and labour in the enjoyment of his conversation. How proud he also seems who is mounted on the top of the waggon to arrange the load!—but still prouder he who forms the haystack in the farm-yard! he will boast of its roundness, firmness, and regularity for many a night over his ale, and appeal to the old men, who, instead of answering him, will enter into a long narrative of the large stacks which they have formed when young men.

> "The grateful sweetness of the new-mown hay,
> Breathing refreshment, fans the toiling swain.
> And soon the jocund dale and echoing hill
> Resound with merriment: the simple jest,
> The village tale of scandal, and the taunts
> Of rude unpolish'd wit, raise sudden bursts
> Of laughter from beneath the spreading oak,
> Where, thrown at ease, and shelter'd from the sun,
> The plain repast and wholesome beverage cheer
> Their spirits."

There is a charm in scenes like these—a something that rushes upon the heart like the joyousness of boyhood—happiness felt, not seen. How beautifully has honest Izaak Walton dwelt upon the repose of country scenery! "Turn out of the way a little, good scholar, towards yonder high honeysuckle-hedge; there we ll sit and sing, while this shower falls so gently upon the teeming earth, and gives yet a sweeter smell to the lovely

flowers that adorn these verdant meadows. Look! under that broad beech-tree I sat down when I was last this way a-fishing;

and the birds in the adjoining grove seem to have a friendly contention with an echo whose dead voice seemed to live in a hollow tree, near to the brow of that primrose-hill;—there I sat, viewing the silver streams glide silently towards their centre, the tempestuous sea; yet sometimes opposed by rugged roots and pebble-stones, which broke their waves, and turned them into foam: and sometimes I beguiled the time by viewing the harmless lambs, some leaping securely in the cool shade, while others sported themselves in the cheerful sun, and saw others craving comfort from the woollen udders of their bleating dams. As I thus sat, these and other sights had so fully possest my soul with content, that I thought, as the poet has happily expressed it,

> 'I was for that time lifted above earth,
> And possest joys not promised in my birth.'

As I left this place and entered into the next field, a second pleasure entertained me: 'twas a handsome milkmaid, that had not yet attained so much age and wisdom as to load her mind with any fears of many things that never will be, as too many men too often do; but she cast away all care, and sung like a nightingale. Her voice was good, and the ditty fitted for it; it was that smooth song which was made by Kit Marlowe now at least fifty years ago: and the milkmaid's mother sung an answer to it, which was made by Sir Walter Raleigh in his younger days. They were old-fashioned poetry, and choicely good—I think much better than the strong lines now in fashion in this critical age."

Is not this beautiful? What a smell of green fields! Seem we not borne away by the honest old man under the honeysuckle-hedge into the hayfields, filled with fragrance at eventide, what time the young moon appears in the sky, and while the haymakers are still at work, fearful to lose an hour of that fine weather which still

> "Hangs golden all about the sky."

Pleasant is the creaking sound of the hay-waggon, as the

wheels roll smoothly along the new-mown fields, down grassy lanes which are seldom traversed excepting in harvest time,

across the river-ford, in which both wain and horses are mirrored, and where the driver and the steeds keep pace, step for step, as

they "move double" with those below, on their way to where the half-piled rick is seen on the opposite bank; and ever from where the grass still stands uncut, comes the loud crake of the landrail, still heard at the same distance, however near we may draw, for the bird seems to glide as noiselessly through the verdure as an eel does along the water.

Although hay-making generally commences in June, our Saxon ancestors called July "Heu-monath," or hay-month, a time at which early rye is now sometimes cut, and which almost leads us to conclude that our harvests are gathered earlier now than they were some centuries ago.

But hay-making is not the only work now carried on in the fields, for we hear by the loud pitiful bleating that comes from the direction of the little river, or meadow-stream, that sheep-washing has commenced. Thitherward we will now bend our way. Solomon must have looked upon a scene like this, for in his "Songs" he compares the teeth of his bride "to a flock of sheep coming up from the washing." From within and without the wattled-fence, along the brook, and by the neighbouring barns, you hear nothing but the dreamy bleating of the sheep, as they call to or answer each other—while the lambs keep up a continuous "baa," plaintive and piteous, and are quite at a loss to discover their dams among the dripping and noisy flock that are congregated on the opposite bank. Look at those swarthy and sun-tanned sons of the soil, standing mid-way in water, their sleeves turned up, and their bare sinewy arms half buried in the woolly fleece of the sheep they have clutched, and which, by main strength, they souse head over ears; and no sooner is the sheep released from the hands of the first washer, and swimming towards the shore, than it is caught by a second—has another hug and a souse; is passed to a third, and then the ablution is complete. It then lands among its drenched companions, and they seem to condole with each other, and to ask, in their way, "What is this for?"

Nor is such a scene without its harmless merriment. You see some sturdy little fellow grappling with a great overgrown sheep, which he manages to get to the edge of the water, when overhead

they go together, to the great amusement of the bystanders; it being almost difficult to decide which has the silliest look of the two, the sheep or Jack. The peasants on the bank, the white flock contrasting with the green trees above and the velvet sward below, the bright water, in which the whole picture is mirrored, the village spire seen beyond the trees, a grey thatched cottage here and there breaking through the openings of the foliage—all make up one of those quiet English pictures which we ever, through the "mind's eye," recall with pleasure, when we are miles away from the spot.

After the washing, comes sheep-shearing, or "the clipping," as it is still called in a few old-fashioned country villages. The sheep are allowed some days to dry, and rest themselves after they have been washed, before they are "clipped." "Cause why?" argue the knowing old farmers, "the fleece again becomes oily, and the shears almost slip through the wool without any help." So they are allowed to sleep and feed undisturbed for nine or ten days, when their troubles are renewed. The table or board, on which a dozen men are frequently seen shearing at once, generally consists of the great barn-doors, which are lifted off their hinges for the occasion, and placed the height required. Then the shearers make bets of pots of ale, who shall clip a sheep quickest, and the shears rattle again nimbly as a barber's scissors. It is wonderful what a number of sheep a dozen good clippers will get through in the course of a day, and the high pile of wool the fleeces make by night.

After the sheep are clipped and turned out, there is such a "baaing" and running to and fro, as is only to be heard on those occasions. The lambs do not know their own dams again, and no wonder at it, as when they saw them a few minutes before, they looked fat and were well covered with wool, and now they are to appearance long, lean, and lanky, and looking as if they would hardly yield more than four mutton-chops to the pound. But the recognition takes place at last; then there is such a wagging of lambs' tails, that the rate at which women's tongues go at times is as nothing compared to them. It is an old sheep-shearing adage, that a woman's tongue who talks much "goes

faster than the wagging of a lamb's tail." And there are generally plenty of these fair village gossips at the sheep-washings and shearings, and many a sharp encounter of wit takes place

between the women and the shearers. They say, "It is a wise lamb that knows its own father," and "on this hint they speak" out.

Sheep-shearing is an ancient festival, and we read, in the Book of Samuel, of Nabal, "a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel, who had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep. And when David's young men came, they said to Nabal, We come in a *good day*. And Nabal said, Shall I then take my bread, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be? Then Abigail (the wife of Nabal) made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs—[to take to David]. And Nabal held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken."—We read again, in the same book, of Absalom having sheep-shearers, and inviting all the king's sons to the feast. And David was afraid to let all his sons go, lest they should cause Absalom too great an expense. There too they made merry with wine.

We also read, as in Exodus, that the feast of harvest shall be kept,—of their rejoicing according to the joy of harvest, of their shouting when the harvest had fallen, &c. To a lover of the country, it is very pleasant to find that these ancient customs, which are so harmless, are reviving. Customs that have lived nearly four thousand years, and have gladdened the hearts of the peasantry in many countries, and are almost as old as the harvest itself, should not be allowed to die. English landowners,—wealthy squires and rich farmers, holders of ancient manors—men who live in the heart of poetry—step forth and revive these honest, harmless, ancient merry-makings. I am glad that a few have already commenced the good work; that they are reprinting and getting up afresh these beautiful scraps of poetry, before they are altogether lost! Were I a farmer or a wealthy landowner, it would be my delight to sit at the head of such a feast.

To think that Abraham may have presided at such a scene!—that David, the great poet, may have lifted up his voice in the valleys of Palestine, and joined in the shouts of sheep-shearing feasts or harvest-homes!—that Solomon may have sat in all his glory at such entertainments!—that even Saul may have thrown off his armour for the night and made merry at such seasons!

I remember well, when a boy, going over the hills, with my companions, to eat the furmety, "streaked with sugar, and spotted with plums," at Park-house, an old solitary grange adjoining the woods, where the ancient sheep-shearing feast was well kept up. We all ate from one immense wooden bowl, which was placed

upon a round table, that we might have equal access to it. We were also furnished with wooden spoons; and it was laughable to see us smeared up to the very forehead with milk and plums, or jostling the contents from each other's spoons. The elder branches of the visitors were in another room; and while they were singing and feasting, we boys, after our furmety feast, were turned into the gardens and orchards, to swing, or eat fruit, or make merry as we could. May-games, sheep-shearing feasts, and harvest-homes, and many other good old customs, are yet kept up in my native county, and two goodly May-poles yet rear their tall heads within a short distance of the spot where I was born; and when I last passed, there were still hanging upon them the proud trophies of the preceding year.

These ancient merry-makings are hardly earned by the poor shepherds, as all know who are at all acquainted with country life. Many a cold bitter night, when the stars seem to look down with freezing eyes, are they compelled to be out during the lambing season to look after their flocks,—

> "When we are fast asleep, and all the world is still."

Bloomfield was familiar with these night scenes, and had the folded flocks in his "mind's eye," when he wrote the following beautiful description of clouds:—

> "Detached in ranges through the air,
> Spotless as snow, and countless as they're fair;
> Scattered immensely wide from east to west,
> The beauteous semblance of a flock at rest."

Another picturesque feature of the fields and lanes in Summer, is a gipsy encampment; and some years ago I visited these Arabs of the moors and wastes; and, in company with a young friend, passed the whole night in the camp. We were at that time "ruralizing," and had put up at a lonely road-side house; and as we were going out one evening, mine host cautioned us against wandering too far, and said, "A gang of gipsies are encamped in the neighbourhood between the woods; and as the place is lonely, and there are some rough-looking fellows amongst them, who will have money by hook or crook, I advise you not

to venture near them. Not that I have any reason to complain of their dishonesty, for they have always paid me for whatever they have purchased, and I have often visited their camps and been treated kindly; but perhaps they might not behave so well to strangers."

We thanked the good old host for his advice, and said, "If we should by chance wander as far as the encampment, and send a card, with an order for any liquor, do not hesitate to let the bearers have it; and as to our safety, we must trust to Providence."

We had almost forgotten our host's advice, so absorbed had our minds been in admiring the beautiful scenery around us; and had not our memories been refreshed by the appearance of a fire, we should probably have thought no more of the gipsies. The love of adventure, however, allured us onward to the camp; for my companion had a great wish to see these old denizens of the "merry greenwood."

There is a something in the unstudied gait of the gipsies which I have always admired, though I know they are "born thieves"—an untamed lordliness in their motions, and a kind of forest dignity in their independent deportment—a something smacking of the movement of a deer, and which you rarely see in the inhabitants of cities. They are only seen to advantage in the wild wood, on the skirts of the lonely forest, or when traversing the wide moors and heaths: they are then component parts of the picture: their loose, careless costume, their women with red cloaks and olive countenances, their trains of donkeys and camp equipage, always produce a pictorial effect in such scenery. They have also an eye to the romantic, erecting their camps in situations the most beautiful: the forest glade, the grassy lane, the corner of a wild heath, shadowed by some picturesque tree, a lane hidden by high hedges, a hollow in the hills, or the winding path of a wood, are to them welcome homes.

The mode in which we should first introduce ourselves to these denizens of the forest was rather perplexing. We knew that we had no right to intrude upon their camp—that they thought their grassy hearth was as much their own, while they held possession of the wayside, as the marble one of a marquis; that

they shunned the haunts of men in order to be alone, and but rarely entered the houses of others except on errands of business,

and that they had every reason to look upon intruders like ourselves with suspicion. I was not altogether a stranger to their

habits, for when a boy, hungry and weary with birdnesting, I have been welcomed to their camps, have partaken of their food, played with their ragged children, rode upon their dogs and donkeys, and fallen asleep upon their brown tent-blankets: I have even now a love for the vagrants. We approached the huge fire without appearing to be the least daunted, although we felt so, and, throwing off all restraint, as far as possible, determined to mould ourselves as much as possible to their manners.

"You've been very merry," said my companion, taking up a burning branch and lighting a cigar: but the deep and angry bay of several rough dogs was the only answer he received to his remark, until a few kicks from a tall gipsy, and "Lay down, Lounger, Crab, and Vixen!" had in a measure soothed the angry voices of these able defenders, who retired growling, as if they would rather bite than make peace with strangers. They were singing before we came upon them.

"Yes, sir, we are not often sad," replied a good-looking, dark-eyed gipsy-girl, as soon as the dogs were quiet. "Will you sit down and warm you?—the night air is rather cold."

My companion seated himself beside her on a pile of sods, but not without a frowning look from a young man who was busied in cutting a smooth head to an immense stick, or club rather, so thick and knotted was its appearance.

"Have you got any pipes, old fellow?" said I, addressing an old man who had several times attempted to light his own, which was very short, and seemed to contain but little tobacco.

"Yes, plenty; but no 'bacca," was the reply.

I then produced a well-filled pouch of real shag, and throwing my cigar into the fire, seized upon a short clean pipe, selecting it from a handful presented by the pretty gipsy-girl. Several others also took pipes, both men and women, and we all seated ourselves around the fire, smoking and talking as we chose; while the red light flashing upon the dark trees, and the white smoke curling towards the starry sky, with the outstretched dogs, and wild countenances of the gipsies, formed a picture

which an artist could not have passed without sketching. There were three tents standing in a triangular form, the entrance to each fronting the fire: they were built much after the form of a waggon-tilt, the bows forming arches, which were covered with blankets or oil-cloth, that rendered them proof against the rain. Around the fire were placed bundles of reeds and straw, and turf seats, and a kind of slight fence joined each of the tents: this fence was covered with long rushes thrown over the broken branches of trees, and was meant to serve as a shelter from the wind. The cackling of hens and ducks seemed to issue from some part of the outer works, and once we heard distinctly the squeak of a little pig; but as the old woman shouted to the children who were between the blankets to be still, we made no remarks upon these sounds. Sometimes, indeed, a little brown brat would thrust his head and shoulders from out the blankets, show his white teeth and dark eyes, and then dive under them again, or keep a look-out from some of the eyelets, of which there was no lack.

A tall, thin, aged woman was busily engaged in superintending the supper, which was boiling in a large iron pan suspended from three strong stakes by a chain: she bore no bad resemblance to one of the witches in "Macbeth" bending over the bubbling caldron. Another was watching the progress of some hedgehogs (or urchins, as they were called by the gipsies), which were simmering in a frying-pan over some wood embers drawn apart from the edge of the larger fire. One of the gipsies offered me the leg of a hedgehog, which I tasted, and found it to vary but little from the flavour of sucking pig. It is in winter that the gipsies consider them in season, when they are very fat: there appeared to be no lack of lard in the pan—no doubt fortune-telling had extracted this from some farmer's larder. An old man, whose face I fancied had been familiar to me in my boyish days, sat with folded arms bending over the fire: once or twice he looked upon my face, but spoke not a word. Three gipsy-girls sat together, and when we first entered the encampment were amusing themselves with cards: one of them, whose hair was as "dark as the longest night," sat swaying herself to and

fro, and endeavoured by this motion, and a low wild air which she chanted, to bring slumber upon a pair of little eyes that peeped brightly out from under the folds of her silk handkerchief; but the little gipsy child had no inclination to sleep, and only kept up a kind of low chorus to his mother's sweet notes. Two or three lounging fellows were half-reclined before the fire, smoking, with one elbow resting on the ground, and supporting their heads on one hand, while with the other they kept heaping huge branches on the flames. One of them amused himself by calling a dog to him, and when the animal approached, whiffed a volume of smoke in his face, which acted like snuff upon the nasal organs of his shaggy companion. Another, whose name was Hector, and whose form would not have disgraced that famous hero, quietly allowed a dog to lick his face, which was in no wise of the cleanest.

We had despatched two of the gipsies, with an order for ale, &c., to the public-house, on our first arriving at the camp.

"They are a long time bringing the drink," said I, for want of a better subject to converse upon, well knowing that the distance prevented their returning so soon: "they are a long time: surely no one has run away with them."

"'Tis neither two nor three would run away with Israel and Gibeon," answered the young mother, who had succeeded in getting her child to sleep. "Besides, they have got Vixen with them; and he would tear any man down. He did once seize a gamekeeper by the collar who was peeping through the back of our camp like a thief, instead of coming forward like a gentleman, and giving us good-even: I dare say the dog thought that he intended to steal the donkeys!"

"He would be a cunning dog," said I, "to distinguish a thief from an honest man; and if we are to be tried by the same rule, our reception by the dogs was not very flattering."

"Nay!" answered she, "the dogs always bark at the appearance of strangers; but from the manner in which Lounger has been climbing about and fondling you, I believe he considers you honest."

"I imagine," answered my companion, laughing, "that my

friend is principally indebted to the remains of a biscuit for the good-will that now reigns between him and Lounger."

"That I can answer for," replied the fair girl: "for the dog brought me a portion, and laid it at my feet."

Israel and Gibeon had by this time returned with the liquor, and every earthen vessel was soon called into use, for the hasty supper had been despatched during their absence; nor had mine host allowed them to depart without partaking of his cold ham, a considerable portion of which he had cut up, together with

plenty of bread, and sent down with the ale. The time passed away merrily: song followed song, the old man produced his fiddle, and we had a dance upon the grass, to the clapping of little hands; for every gipsy brat had withdrawn the curtains of the tents, and sat up between the blankets, laughing and shouting, and participating in the mirth as much as if they had been actors in it.

Abigail, the old gipsy woman, told her best tales; and the girls,

after dancing with us, sang several excellent songs, while their lovers or husbands joined in the chorus. The old wood rang with our merriment; and if any stranger had passed at the time, he might have deemed that another Robin Hood, with "his merry men all," had again taken up their abode in the greenwood.

It was daylight when we broke up, and at parting the old gipsy chief presented me with a curious walking-stick of oak, round which he had carved a snake, that went twining from top to bottom. This stick I had for several years, and one day unfortunately broke it, in trying to knock off a portion of a large decayed branch in Sherwood Forest. The gipsies treated us like good fellows, and I frequently met with some of them afterwards, in my rural rambles, when they always hailed me as an old friend.

A SUMMER WALK.

A VILLAGE CHURCHYARD—COTTAGES OF THE PEASANTRY—WOODLAND DREAMS—POOLS AND REPTILES—MOISTURE OF TREES—WATER-INSECTS—HEDGE-HOGS—HARVEST-MOUSE—A RURAL PICTURE—AN OLD-FASHIONED ROADSIDE ALEHOUSE.

STILL green country churchyard shall be our starting point, where sleep "the rude forefathers of the hamlet;" for we are about to traverse the fields they have cultivated, the hills they have climbed, the woods they have wandered through, and the streams by which they have often sat to rest and refresh themselves — spots

still beautiful, that "will never know them, no more, for ever."

> "They suffered, but their pangs are o'er;
> Enjoyed, but their delights are fled;
> Had friends—their friends are now no more;
> And foes—their foes are dead."

It does a man good to walk abroad, and muse among these green resting-places; they are so different to city churchyards. There is no roll, and tramp, and thunder of busy every-day life here—no roar of the great ocean of human voices—nothing to disturb our meditation. The very rustling of the leaves seems to add to the silence which reigns over the dead. All around spread the footpaths they have traversed; spots where they played as children; where they wooed and won the rustic beauties they afterwards wedded; where they led their own children by the hand, and pointed out green nooks, in which grew the sweetest of Summer flowers; and where, when bent with age, they tottered out to bask in the sunshine, look round and think the scenery would still remain the same, when they were laid in their "narrow cells," and could look upon it no more. Then those little cottages are in the churchyard; there is only a road dividing them from the bedroom in which they rest after their day's labour, and the little bed in which they will at last sleep their long sleep. Do they ever think of this? They will rest so near to their old homes, that, were they to wake, they could still hear the children calling to one another, out of the very doors from whence they were carried by their sorrowing neighbours. The very sunshine from the chamber windows where they died, will flash back and play upon the green that covers their grave. And on "cleaning-days," when the looking-glass, in which they have so often gazed, is removed and stands with its face to the churchyard, the survivors will see the very grave thrown into the room, on which the light of the mirror plays. The dead will ever be there, from dewy eve to

> "The early, early morning, when the summer sun doth shine."

These village churchyards recall Abraham and the field of Machpelah, with its border of trees, which he purchased of

Ephron the Hittite for a burying-ground, and where he buried Sarah. And there Isaac, who loved to walk in the fields at eventide, often paused beside his mother's grave, and on an after day he would lead Rebekah by the hand and point out where Sarah slept—she who had prepared food for her angelic visitors. And Rebekah would tell him how her old nurse Deborah was buried under an oak, which for ages after was called the "Oak of Weeping." Such solemn associations do these green burial-places awaken, only because the trees wave there, and there the bladed grass grows, just as they did in the field of Machpelah, where Abraham walked out in Summer time, in the old centuries, which eternity has devoured.

More cottages—some of the porches covered with woodbine too, which is now in flower. One would hardly think care and trouble came here, with all this sweet green country lying around, and they standing in the very centre of a land of flowers as they do. To the poor peasant, perhaps, these fertile fields bring only the remembrance of years of hard toil—a long life of industry and economy, which must end in the workhouse, or leaving him a recipient of the miserable allowance which is doled out grumblingly to the poor old paupers. And this wood which we have now entered, would perhaps but remind him of the faggots he bound, and the hurdles he made, during the frost and snow of many a biting and bitter Winter. He would not notice the beauty of these

"Green-robed senators of mighty woods,"

which are now clothed in all the beauty of their Summer array; for he never could afford to bring his wife and children to picnic here; for when they came, it was to gather fuel for the fire, or the ripe wild wood-fruits of Autumn, to eke out their scanty store. Alas! that it should be so.

Those who wish to see what the gloom and grandeur of a wood is, should visit it now, when all the trees are in full leaf, and the whole scene is shadowed with the deepest foliage of Summer; they will then see in what graceful forms the branches fall, and what beautiful effects of light and shade they produce. How

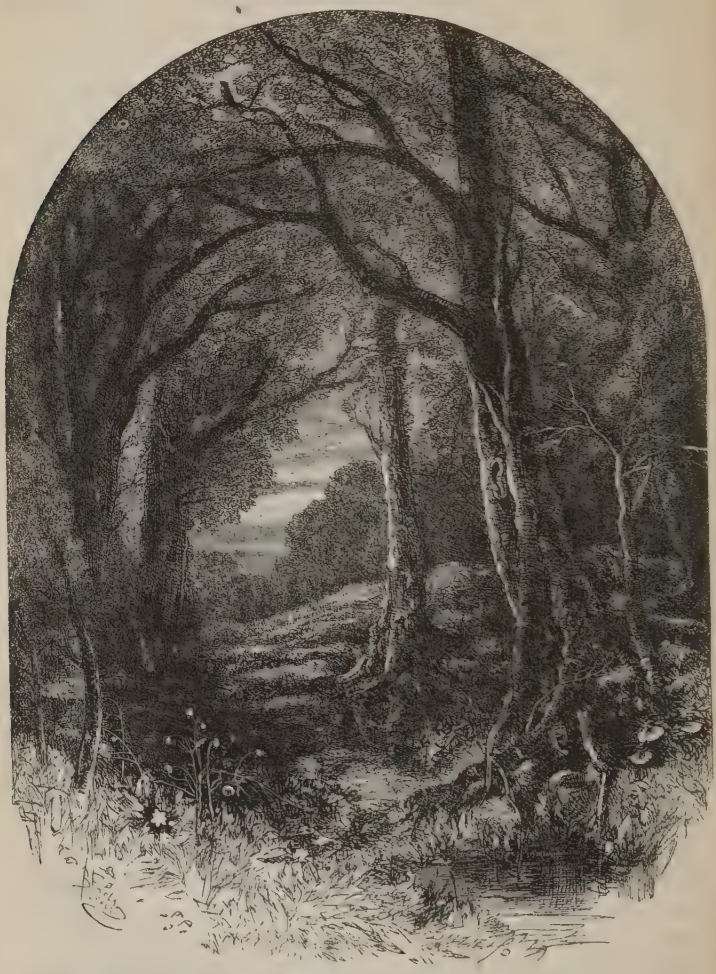
short a time it seems since we went with a beloved friend into this very wood to gather violets! Who could have deemed that the voice which then gave utterance to all those pleasing thoughts—that poured forth words rapidly as a bird utters its own music—should so soon become mute? And could all those young hopes die? could those ideas perish which grew stronger every day, seeming even independent of the body, gathering power from things unseen, saving to the mind's eye, and grappling with remote worlds, which fancy peopled—even such as he dreamed the soul would inhabit? No, such souls can never die! Though the tender spray, dotted with ten thousand hopes, realized the expectations of Spring, and flushed broadly into Summer's green lap their full tribute of leaves; though Autumn came with such stealthy steps that his march was unperceived; and brought such a beauty in his decay, that we saw not the havoc he had spread, until Winter showed his bleak forehead in the naked distance, and gazed in proud triumph on the desolation he had made;—the immortal part still liveth and can never perish.

What visions have we beheld in forests floating among the summer greenery, as we lay with half-shut eyes

> "Under an oak, whose antique roots peep'd out
> Upon the brook that brawl'd along the wood!"

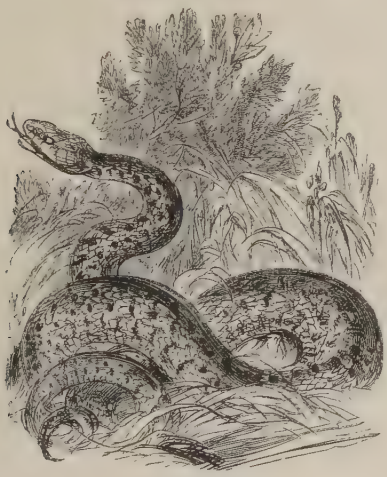
Sometimes the long leaves talked and swayed to and fro; now lifting up their husky voices, and sending forth a string of rustling words, then sinking down to prolonged whispers, or just moving their green lips, and making sounds a little lower than the lisping of the brook. Then a golden form would spring from a pillow of light, and bury its beamy head in the blue folds of the foliage, its twinkling feet glittering among the heavy grass, which shone like silken tassels beneath the pressure of the tall sunbeam. The rainbow-dyed plumage of the pheasant squatting under the broad fern spread out before our dreamy eyelids like the rich folds of an eastern maiden's mantle; and the darker leaves of the underwood threw out lines of raven tresses; while the jarring of branches sounded like the tramp of

horsemen who were in search of the bright-eyed sultana. Two pale flowers bending towards each other formed her clasped



hands; and as they moved nearer together, our heart sent forth a prayer for her safety. The dark trailing bramble falling in

stripes over the red bracken, imaged a couchant tiger on the watch beneath an old oak; the moving spray of a woodbine seemed coiled like his tail in anger; and the crimson flowers of the betony brightened into eyes which we gazed upon until they glared, and even uplifted our arm with a sleepy effort to parry the anticipated spring, and startled, as the alarmed snake shot out, disturbed by the motion, and went winding its way through



the underwood. Then we listened to the sound of the brook, that fell

> "Among the moss with hollow harmony,
> Dark and profound. Now on the polish'd stones
> It danced, like childhood, laughing as it went;
> Then through the plain in tranquil wanderings crept,
> Reflecting every herb and drooping bud
> That overhung its quietness."

We heard wild music, floating between us and the sky; then it seemed to linger in distant dells, or even sounded at our feet; and when we sprang up, the chirp of the grasshopper, the low notes of birds, the billowy converse of the leaves, and the stream talking in its sleep, were all the sounds we heard. The murmur

of harp-strings, the clear voice of women, the low rumble of a drum, the far-off sound, as of a lute,

> "That round a lonely ruin swells,
> Which, wandering on the echoing shore,
> The enthusiast hears at evening,"

that died away, then all was hushed! Then we saw processions in the waving flowers; banners fluttering in the tall scarlet poppies; white plumes nodding in the thistledown; knights in gold and silver armour in the yellow kingcups and white daisies; and graceful maidens, bending their beautiful forms to listen to the warriors whom they seemed to be riding beside, in the cuckoo-flowers. Scouts flew to and fro in the form of butterflies, and whispered their messages into the ears of lady fair or baron bold, then hurried on again to the utmost verge of the gorgeous cavalcade. Pages also were in attendance in the gaudy livery of the tiger-moth; and ever and anon the humble-bee sounded his trumpet, and the humming gnats blew their tiny horns, while ranks of blue-bells and cohorts of lilies seemed to move before us in the breeze. Towns and palaces were painted on the mossy stems of trees, and many other scenes,

> "Some hung with arras green and blue,
> Showing a gaudy summer morn,
> Where with puff'd cheek the belted hunter blew
> His wreathed bugle-horn.
>
> "One show'd an English home—grey twilight pour'd
> On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
> Softer than sleep—all things in order stored—
> A haunt of ancient peace."

Bright Summer days seem as if they were sent for man to walk abroad in, and worship the wonderful works of his Creator. In places like this, the heart of an old wood, there is a quietness which falls on the spirit, unlike that found in any other scene. The summits of mountains are silent; but there are none of those thought-suggesting shadows lying there, which hang like mysteries in the gloom of forests. Nor has a pool of water the same appearance when it lies open and unsheltered. In a wood it forms another sky, on which the trees are thrown bold, clear,

and bright, with every branch defined in such a manner as you never see done by looking upward. But a pool in a wood, to the timorous, conjures up shoals of frogs and toads, and all manner of ill-looking creeping things. We have a word or two to say in defence of these poor harmless reptiles, which we omitted doing when describing the tadpoles in a previous page, "nasty things," as pretty mouths are in the habit of puckering up and calling them—nor will we argue that they are the most agreeable-looking objects, nor very likely to be made pets of, though this has been done before now, and by ladies too. All we wish to prove is, that they are perfectly harmless and inoffensive. They are beautiful leapers and expert swimmers, and we have seen frogs so

exquisitely marked, that the finest lady in the land would have coveted a dress that was variegated with such rich black and yellow greens as the frog wears. Nor is there a more useful creature in a garden than a toad—he is unequalled as a destroyer of worms and insects, and may be rendered so tame that he will take food out of the hand of his keeper; as to its being poisonous, that is a foolish idea, long since exploded. Watch a toad when it is about to seize upon an insect, and its method of attack will astonish you: the insect is, perhaps, motionless, when it first arrests the eye of the reptile—the toad sees it, and becomes motionless also, its head drawn back, and its eye fixed and bright as a star. The insect moves, and is

gone, how you know not; so rapid is the action, that, however narrowly you might watch, you could not see the toad strike it with its tongue—a touch, a motion quicker than human sight, and the prey disappears. As before stated, the frog swallows its food in the same way. Few animals have more persecutors than the poor frog, little or big; it is either the prey of bird, beast, or fish, as if it were only created to be devoured. Surely it ought to meet with mercy at our hands; for, according to the theory of the author of "Vestiges of Creation," it is more nearly allied to us than "we wot of," and Æsop it will be remembered made it long ago an eloquent pleader against persecution. For our own part, we have always made it a rule during our

walks to step aside, or wait until either the poor beetles or frogs have got out of the way, or else to lift them amongst the grass, where we thought they would be safe, but never to kill either the one or the other wilfully upon its own freehold. The toads are such venerable old hermits, too; living, nobody can tell how long, in the hollows of trees, and blocks of stone, and deep down in dark coal pits; and, like the fly in amber, sadly puzzling our poor ingenuity to tell how ever they came there at all.

Newts too, called by country-people Efts, are equally harmless, living upon water-insects, worms, and frogs, while the latter are in the tadpole state, and very often on one another,—the warty newt swallowing the common newt whenever he meets

with a chance, and seemingly glad of it. They are beautiful swimmers, and can also walk at the bottom of pools or streams with ease. They lay their eggs on the leaves of water-plants,

which, after having folded the foliage together with their feet, remain as secure and fast as if they formed a part of the leaf itself. Newts are able to swim from the first moment they escape from the eggs.

How cool and moist the earth is here, though it is such a hot Summer day. We have before remarked that trees are great condensers of vapour, and that when all beside is dry, we often find plenty of moisture beneath their branches. This is especially the case where trees stand in high situations. Ivy is a great condenser;

and as its leaves imbibe but little wet, and are of so hard and glossy a nature, it throws off a great quantity of moisture. Woods are never dry underfoot, and woodland streams but rarely; it is the same with meadow-runnels which are overhung with shrubs and bushes, as every leaf that is shadowed therein becomes a feeder. These are facts which ought never to be lost sight of in digging ponds,—let there be plenty of trees planted around them, and they will never be wholly dry. Where trees have been felled, ponds and streams have dried up, or only become water-courses for the rain. Beech-trees, the beauty of which we

have already dwelt upon, throw off great supplies of water. Those who are out in the night, or in the early morning, even when the days have been hot and dry, are well aware that at times everything green is drenched with moisture, not a vestige of which is visible excepting under trees, after the sun has risen two or three hours. Wherever woods have been cleared, water

has diminished, and affected the supply of streams for miles around. Water is always beautiful to look upon, with its shifting colours, as it reflects the sky, whether in wood or field. Then it is pleasant to dream of the creations of our poets, who have peopled it with graceful forms, that dwell in the cool caverns and grots, where they comb their golden hair, and chant wild unearthly songs, coming to the surface now and then to gather the wild flowers that overhang their liquid beds, with which they garland themselves, or sitting like Milton's Sabrina—

> "Under the glossy, cool, translucent wave,
> In twisted braids of lilies knitting
> The loose train of her amber-dropping hair."

When the streams are low through the summer droughts, many curious insects may be seen in the water, which would

escape the eye when the runnels are swollen with the rains of Winter and Spring. Some of these form curious habitations of stones, shells, hollow seeds, straws, even mud and small particles of wood, which they cement together, forming a vaulted roof, or pent-house, over their heads, and with their buildings on their backs they move about in the little world for which Nature has adapted them, accomplish the ends for which they were created, and then die. Amongst these stand foremost the caddis-worms, which compose the little cube-like cells they inhabit, out of stones, with all kinds of irregular angles, and

such as would baffle the skill of any human architect to fasten together. Yet, all this is done by the little caddis-worm. The smooth side of every stone is placed in the interior, and the whole mass secured together by a cement which the water has not the power to dissolve. Even the portion of the body of the worm which is exposed, is hard and firm, while that part which the cell covers is soft; for so has Nature defended this curious insect. To an unpractised eye, the whole of this wonderful structure would present only the appearance of a piece of reed or straw, which the water had discoloured; while the naturalist would find in it the little insect, and a perfect habitation formed of many a loose rough particle, as our engraving shows; but which is so smooth and even at the bottom, that the architect can move about with its house upon its back with ease.

The common stickleback also forms a nest in which it deposits its eggs, and covers them up. The nest, formed of minute particles of straw or wood, is not larger round than a shilling, while the ova, which scarcely exceeds the size of a poppy-seed, is of a bright yellow colour. Another of this species, called the fifteen-spined stickleback, forms its nest and deposits its ova in the sea-weeds, which are found suspended from the lower part of rocks, and which the fish binds together by a white slender thread that resembles silk; and, wet or dry, it stands the action of the wind and sea, and keeps the eggs secure within, either when left dry or while tossed about by the violence of the waves. These eggs have frequently been taken, placed in water, and kept until the small fry have come forth.

Often while looking for Summer flowers in the hedge-bottoms and among the ditches, you will discover the little hedgehog foraging for insects or snails, and if he finds he has not time enough to escape, he will roll himself up in a ball, with his round bristly coat, like a person who is resolved to stand his ground and meet the worst, whatever that may be, until finding, as he thinks, the danger over, he will again uncoil himself and resume his task, searching for frogs, toads, or even mice; for it is only in such shady places that you will meet with him in the day-time, as his favourite feeding time is in the night. What

naturalists assert about its sleeping throughout the whole day is not true, as we once captured one while feeding under an old hedge, one summer afternoon, tied it up in a handkerchief, brought it home, and kept it a long time on bread and milk, vegetables, or whatever came to hand, for scarcely anything came amiss to it. It is true that it sleeps throughout the

winter; but, unlike the dormouse, it is not liable to be wakened by an occasional fine day, neither does it lay up any store of food; but, rolled up into a perfect ball, which you might throw many yards without the animal once uncoiling itself, it sleeps securely through frost, snow, wind, or rain, in its little nest, beneath the hollow root of a tree, or some old rabbit-burrow in a hole of the bank.

The nest of that smallest of all British animals, the harvest-mouse, may now occasionally be found securely attached about midway to two or three corn-stems; for so small, and light, and graceful is this little animal, that it can run with ease up the rounded straw, without shaking the heavy ear that surmounts it. Two of them, when full grown, will scarcely weigh a quarter of an ounce; and the nest, which you might inclose and shut up in the palm of your hand, is almost as round and perfect as the ball which has been turned in a lathe; and though sometimes containing as many as eight or nine young ones, may be rolled across a table without discomposing a single blade of grass or leaf of which it is formed. How this tiny creature contrives to give nourishment to so many young ones, crowded, as they are, in so small a compass, was a puzzle to that clear-headed English naturalist, Gilbert White, and he came at last to the conclusion that she must make holes in different parts of the nest, and feed

them one at a time. If kept in a cage it will feed upon corn, lap water like a dog, and amuse itself like a white mouse or a squirrel, by turning round a wheel. From the head to the

tail it scarcely exceeds two inches in length, and among quadrupeds may be classed as the least and most beautiful, as the humming-bird is amongst the feathered tribes.

Now we have come unaware upon a beautiful village, that stands partly within the entrance of a wood; for so thickly are the outskirts covered with trees, that it is difficult to tell where the wood begins in this embowered and park-like landscape. What a sweet picture! how we envy the power of an Inskipp or a Collins, and sigh because we cannot carry a sketch of it away with us. The cottage roofs and chimneys are covered with rich liver-worts, fungi, and lichen, of every gorgeous hue, that harmonize beautifully with the stems of the surrounding trees; yet are just rendered distinct enough, by a whitewashed or red brick wall, the sunlight that falls upon a diamond-paned window, or the smoke circling up, grey or blue amid the green, to tell us that many a peaceful English home is nestled amid this "land of ancient trees."

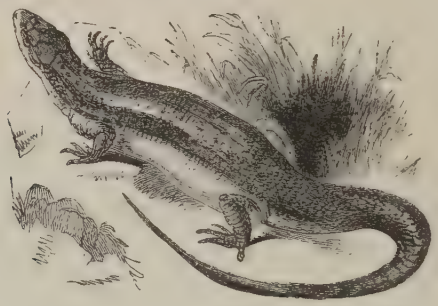
Onward we go, leaving the woodland behind us, across the old bridge, where the falling water thunders and roars like a thing of life. What a "lullaby" that sound must be to the inhabi-

tants of the adjoining cottage, and how they would miss it should the water become silent. And those huge stones that lie

in the torrent are fragments of some rock, that was, perhaps, shivered ages ago, when volcanic fires reddened the midnight,

long before human foot had left its imprint on our island shores.

This dry sunny bank is a likely place in which to find the lizard, the most beautifully marked of all our British reptiles; some of them being spotted with yellow and white, on a ground of green or brown. Though the legs of lizards are short, they



are quick runners, and if you turn them on their backs, you will be astonished to find that the scales are put together much after the form of our old chain-armour which may still be seen in the Tower of London. Some of the lizards lay their eggs, like the ostrich of the desert, in the sand, and there leave them to be hatched by the sun.

What beauty is buried in the skirts of our moors and the hearts of our mighty hills! What voices warble in concert with the wild birds by the borders of ancient forests and silent woods! But seek not to draw them away by alluring wiles—seek not to rob the desert of its only flower; for the comfort of that old man, grey with many years, depends upon her, and that old woman, bent with age, would be hurried to her grave long before her time should their ministering angel be withdrawn. O seek not to darken their little light; for the hum of the bee, and the waving of trees, and the melody of birds, and the beauty of flowers, and the sweet music of their valley stream, would no longer possess a charm if she were taken from them. She was given them by the Almighty for a blessing; and ere long, per-

chance, the youth who steals abashed in the twilight across the wild heath will lead her to where the tall spire rises above the old elms; and that old man will be seen sitting in the sunshine under the woodbine, and patting the heads of little rosy-faced children, with eyes as gentle as their mother's, and steps that would outstrip the lamb;—and others will lean upon this stile as we do now, and point out to their companions the beauty of this very scene.

How pleasant to lie down upon this hill-side, while our eyes wander leisurely over the distant scene! How tempting the far-off hills appear! We wonder what country lies behind them —we long to traverse the beautiful valley which stretches far and wide at their base; where we see the distant river curling its silver neck through the meadows, and watch the white sail until it dwindles to a mere speck. But the scene calls up higher thoughts than these; for there is a Sabbath feeling about the heart, awakened by this thinking silence.

In what pleasant situations do we sometimes find those old-fashioned wayside alehouses, or taverns, during a Summer walk, where the tall sign-post steps far out into the road, as if it had come to meet the traveller, and tell him that there he can find both welcome and refreshment. There is something cheerful in the very creaking of the old weather-beaten sign, which is probably the "Blue Bell," or the "Old Bull's Head," or perchance the "George and Dragon," or it may be the "Black Bear;" for these are among the most ancient emblems of mine host. It is generally a long low house, with a bay-window, or two, projecting out, along the angles of which comfortable seats are placed in the inside, so that, on whichever side you look, you have a pretty view up the road or over the fields, which you have not twice to glance at to tell you that you are at last far away in the country. The doorway is generally covered in with a porch, with its penthouse roof; and on each side there is a seat between the pillars, which are painted with green or red-and-white checquers, or sometimes encircled with a rose-tree, woodbine, or jasmine. Facing the bay-windows, is a long trough filled with clear water, near to which stand curious baskets, placed on long slender legs,

ready to contain a few handfuls of hay or corn, in case the traveller should not choose to have his steed stabled. Either beside this trough and well, looking up and down the road, or in the centre of the porch, stands the healthy-looking landlord, with his pipe in his mouth, ever ready to give a welcome good-day to his customers. The bar, in which his pretty daughter, perhaps, presides, is a perfect pattern of cleanliness and tidiness: everything, down to the very bird-cage, is as clean as hands can make them; and it would fill a catalogue to enumerate all the things which are stowed away in that small space. But it is the great, ample, and sanded kitchen which attracts the eye of the cold and hungry wayfarer. Oh! how different to a smoky beer-deluged tap-room; for it is here where mine host and his family dine, excepting on rare occasions. Let us enter—the floor, though sanded, is white and dry; the tables have also been scoured with free-stone; and we, who have walked ten miles, cannot refrain from throwing hungry glances at the juicy hams, and large flitches which are hung around the wall. Then, the cooking utensils, of brass, copper, or block-tin, all wear such a bright and tempting appearance, that we cannot help looking first at them, then at the couple of plump pullets which are pecking about the door, and the ham which has just been cut, and the sweet-looking greens which we catch a glimpse of through the window in the garden; and taking off our hat, and rearing up our stick, we have a glass of ale and a crust of bread and cheese, while these good things are in preparation. After this, we saunter about for an hour or two, and the landlord, finding that we are about to dine with him, shows us over his garden, orchard, or stables, points out his choicest trees, tells us the quantity of fruit each has borne: and so we while away a pleasant hour; enjoy a comfortable dinner; and, when refreshed and rested, proceed on our journey again, with a light and happy heart.

Sometimes, in the twilight at evening, on turning the corner of the village, we see the blacksmith's ruddy forge, and the country gossips who assemble nightly around the smithy fire, to talk over the news of the day. We meet with quiet foot-passen-

gers, who exchange a friendly "good night,"—or a light cart hurries past at a brisk pace, filled with a merry party, who are returning either from market or a visit; and we hear their joyous laughter ringing upon the silence, until the clapping of a gate, or the barking of a dog, next arrests our attention. And we wander on until, high above the dim wood-crowned hill, "Hesperus that leads the starry host" appears with dazzling front upon the blue vault of heaven; her beauty only dimmed when the moon,

> "Rising in clouded majesty, at length
> Apparent queen, unveils her peerless light,
> And o'er the dark her silver mantle throws."

We wander along in wonder, while gazing upon those mysterious worlds which lie mapped out upon the face of heaven, revolving round and round for evermore—for, whether inhabited or silent, we know not—for He who formed them and hung them in the vast realms of never-ending space, alone knoweth "their end and aim." For such thoughts as these come unawares, while we return home musing, to rest ourselves after a long Summer Walk.

BIRDS IN SUMMER.

SONG OF BIRDS—BULLFINCHES—BLACKBIRD—BLACKCAP—REDSTART—WREN—WOODPECKER — CHIFF-CHAFF—WINCHAT — LINNETS — GOLDFINCH — CHAFFINCH — WILLOW WARBLER—WHITETHROAT, ETC.—BERGARIC'S BEAUTIFUL RURAL SCENE—THE PEACOCK, ETC.

IN the woods, by the waterfalls—concealed by thick bowery hollows—in open glades flooded with sunshine, over miles of valleys that are green and golden with grass and flowers, on hill-tops where the bees hum half-buried in the opening heather bells. the great Summer Band of Birds are now singing their own music.

Nor is their music always the same. If you listen, and hear two thrushes answering one another, you will find one bird replying in different notes to the other. It is also at times very difficult to distinguish one note from another, especially among the different classes of linnets, so much do they sound alike as Summer advances. Some naturalists contend it is not so; but when country boys we used to lay trifling wagers on this very subject, and almost chase the life out of a bird to get a good view of it, and settle the dispute. If we discovered the nest near at hand, that was held proof enough to decide our wager, without running the bird down. As for a bullfinch, we

needed no second glance, for against him we waged war: he was the greatest destroyer of fruit-blossoms of any bird we knew. First he used to begin with the gooseberry-buds, until the cherry-buds got ready, when he helped himself pretty freely to the latter. But he always seemed to prefer the greengages to all other blossoms. We might pelt at him a dozen times, but he would come back again, and perhaps bring half-a-dozen of his big red-breasted brothers to share in the plunder. "Pick-a-bud," the gardeners used to call him; and we have seen as much refuse from half-eaten buds, lying at the foot of a fruit-tree where a number of bullfinches have been feeding, as would have filled a good-sized basin.

Some naturalists say that the bullfinch only picks off such buds as contain the eggs of insects. Mr. Knapp is of opinion that it does not select such buds only as contain the embryo of insects, but feeds on them by accident when they fall in its way, eating good and bad indiscriminately.

And I am inclined to consider Mr. Knapp in the right, not so much from my own observation only as from the general opinion of gardeners, who, in my boyish days, used to destroy the bullfinches on account of the mischief they did among the buds. I cannot, however, agree with him in considering that "it is gifted with no voice to charm us, nor communicates any harmony to the grove, (and that) all we hear is a low and plaintive call to its fellows in the hedge." It is that low and plaintive call, I contend, with all its varied modulations, which renders the song of this bird so pleasing; and if any one is fortunate enough to be near the bullfinch, and can listen to it for some time without putting it to flight, he will then discover a variety of low notes, which, though not so loud as those of its compeers, are not the less musical.

To me there is something very pleasing in this sweet flute-toned piping, when heard issuing from a covert of dark fir-trees, or impenetrable bushes—spots he loves to build in. Then he is such a beautifully marked bird, with his red breast, black head, and ash-coloured back, relieved by the black of his tail and wings, that he makes quite a pretty picture among the green tender leaves of Spring; and you cannot help admiring him, though, at every peck he gives, there goes a cherry or a green-gage plum—that is, if the blossoms "set," as the country people call it. We remember one which was taught to follow the flute. There was a rumour, when I was a boy, that it was necessary to put out the eyes of the bullfinch before training it to sing; and I well recollect the horror I felt when told they were deprived of sight by touching their great beautiful black eyes with a red-hot wire. I knew the bird-fancier well, who was said to be guilty of this cruel deed, but he was so kind to his birds I never believed the report, nor dare I ask him if it were true. Perhaps, after all, the rumour was only one of those "vulgar errors"

which are now fast fading away, and, for the honour of humanity, I hope

"Such things had but a wordy life."

The blackbird, or "golden-bill," as the country-people call it, should be classed amongst our softest and sweetest singers; and you must be pretty near at hand to catch all the low soft notes, which are the sweetest of its music. Like many birds gifted with great powers of song, the blackbird is an imitator of the sounds made by others. He has been heard to imitate closely part of the song of the nightingale; and three or four instances

are recorded of his crowing exactly like the common cock, apparently enjoying the sound of the responses made by the fowls of the neighbouring farmyard; and Mr. Neville Wood, in his "British Song Birds," has mentioned an instance in which he heard a blackbird cackle as a hen does after laying.

The males, during the first year, resemble the females so much as not easily to be distinguished from them; but after that, they assume the yellow bill, and other distinguishing marks of their kind. The blackbird is a solitary bird, frequenting woods and

thickets, chiefly of evergreens, such as holly, pines, firs, &c., especially where there are springs, which together afford it both shelter and subsistence. Wild blackbirds feed on berries, fruits, insects, and worms; but never fly in flocks like thrushes, and pair very early. As I have before stated, the blackbird may be numbered amongst the earliest songsters of Spring, and often heard until the very middle of Summer. The female builds her nest in bushes or low trees, and lays four or five eggs, of a bluish-green colour, marked irregularly with dusky brown spots. The young birds are easily brought up tame, and may be taught to sing a great variety of tunes, for which their clear, melodious tones are well adapted. They are restless and timorous birds, easily alarmed, and difficult of access; but Buffon observes that they are more restless than cunning, and more timorous than suspicious, as they readily suffer themselves to be caught with bird-lime, nooses, and all sorts of snares. They are never kept in aviaries; for, when shut up with other birds, they pursue and harass their companions unceasingly, for which reason they are generally confined in cages, seeming to have a preference for those made of osiers, with steep slanting roofs, and plenty of room between the openings to get their heads out. The blackbird is the "ouzel-cock" so often mentioned in our old ballads; and in some counties of England he still retains his old poetical name. He stays with us all the year round; and, I think, if only for that, and his sweet piping, he ought to be spared by the sportsman. He is too good a singer to be shot; and I do not envy the feeling of that man who, having killed a blackbird, can listen to the notes of the same species in Summer, without feeling sorry for what he has done.

The blackcap, though he is no great beauty, and looks almost as if he wore a wig, is what one of our old writers calls "a bird with a brave heart;" and as for his song, it is almost equal to that of the nightingale, it is so full, sweet, and yet deep and loud, and expresses such a great variety of modulations, as to exceed every other bird in that respect, except the sweet songstress of the night. One of its notes is a particularly long, soft shake, which sinks gradually into the lowest strain, though every note is per-

fectly distinct ; till, just as it is dying away, the cadence again rises, and swells into a full burst of loud and joyful melody. When the blackcap sings, its throat is wonderfully distended, and its little body apparently quivers with delight. The nest of this sweet singer is generally placed in some low bush or shrub, and is built in a very firm and compact manner. The eggs are four or five in number, of a pale reddish brown, dashed with spots of a darker hue. It is very fond of ivy berries, and generally makes its nest in an ivy bush, when one is to be met with not too far from the ground. The blackcap is also fond of gardens and orchards, where, during the whole breeding time, it makes the surrounding neighbourhood ring again with its silvery music.

Large flocks of young redstarts are frequently seen at this season, and they attract attention by their splendid plumage of grey, red, and black.

The redstart is fond of building in crevices in old walls, or in vases, or broken parts of statues, or any ornament which may be placed in a garden. "If we visit in the Summer season," says Mr. Slaney, "any one of those old castles or monastic ruins, which give so much additional interest to many parts of our country, whilst the daws respond to each other with their appropriate melancholy call, as we walk round the ruined walls and fallen fragments, this elegant bird will often flit before us ; and,

standing on a broken battlement or moss-grown pillar, shake his bright plumage, as if in triumph over the works of man!" It

is said that when the redstart first arrives in Spring, it mounts to the top of the loftiest tree, where it will sit and sing for hours, beginning at daybreak. Its song is short, and not very striking; but it will sing at night as well as in the daytime, and may be taught any tune that is whistled to it. The redstart is an active and restless bird, and, when singing, shakes its tail with a rapid and tremulous motion.

But it is not the sweet songsters alone that enliven the fields and woods; there is the ring of the cuckoo's voice, the screaming of the jay, and the low cooing of the wood-pigeons, which give a pleasing diversity to rural sounds. As they dart suddenly across the woodland path, there is something very pleasing in the changing plumage which at every few yards catches the eye for a moment, and is gone—in the beautiful blue dashes of the jay, and the dazzling lustre of the pheasant, and not less so in the agreeable change of the black and white of the magpie, as he hurries across and hides himself in the underwood. What close observers many of our old poets were of the habits of birds! Brown, in his "Pastorals," marks the grey dawn of morning by the thrush, and says it was so early—

"That the throstle hath not been
Gathering worms yet on the green,
But attends her nest.
Not a bird hath taught her young,
Nor her morning's lesson sung
In the shady grove."

Then as the day advances, he tells us that—

"The birds on every tree
Greet the morn with melody;"

and every one acquainted with the country, who has paid any attention to the singing of birds, will acknowledge the truthful-

ness of the poet's remarks. For many a songster will not sing, until it feels the first rays of the sun warming the raw morning air.

The same poet's description of young wrens first trying to fly, and endeavouring to outrival one another in ascending a tree, is very beautiful:—

> "As little wrens but newly fledge,
> First by their nests hop up and down the hedge;
> Then one from bough to bough gets up a tree:
> His fellow, noting his agility,
> Thinks he as well may venture as the other.
> So flustering from one spray to another,
> Gets to the top, and then emboldened flies
> Unto an height past ken of human eyes."

The "Kitty Wren," as children in the country prettily call it, is a pleasing object when seen hopping from branch to branch, with its little tail sticking up, and its observant head held aside. And very particular is the female about the arrangement of her nest, which she never seems satisfied with, unless it is well sheltered from the rain; and on this account she always chooses a nook under the thatch, the cavity in a hollow tree, the projecting bank of a hedge, a hole in a hayrick, or some similarly protected place. The material used in building the nest is generally that which is nearest at hand, and, of course, differs in different situations; one that was built near a schoolroom being actually constructed in great part of the scrapings and feathers of writing quills! The wren is generally very desirous to conceal her nest; and when she has brought a bundle of moss almost as large as herself, she will hop about from branch to branch, carrying her load with her, "anxiously waiting for some slow-walking passenger to move away before she ventures to approach the spot where the nest is in progress." Mr. Knapp, in his "Journal of a Naturalist," relates, among the stratagems of a wren to conceal her nest from observation, that she had formed a hollow space in the thatch inside a cow-shed, in which she had placed her nest by the side of a rafter, and finished it with her usual neatness; but, lest the orifice of the cell should engage attention, she had negligently hung a ragged piece of

moss on the straw-work, concealing the entrance, and apparently proceeding from the rafter; and so perfect was the deception, that it would not have been noticed, had not the bird betrayed her own secret by darting out. When the wren is sitting, if she sees any one approaching, she gives utterance to a peculiar cry of rage, which sounds like "*Check! check!*" and she repeats this many times with vehemence, as though she were scolding

outrageously, particularly when the intruder appears frightened, and runs away; in which case the wren sometimes follows to a considerable distance, with loud manifestations of anger. The nest is very large in proportion to the small size of the bird, and so deep that the young ones are kept almost in darkness. The young are very numerous, as many as sixteen having been found in one nest; and both their number and the darkness of their abode have been alluded to by Grahame, in his poem on the birds of Scotland:—

> "The numerous progeny, claimants for food
> Supplied by two small bills, and feeble wings
> Of narrow range; supplied--ay, duly fed—
> Fed in the dark, and yet not one forgot."

The wren, in England, is generally kindly treated, even by boys; but, in Ireland, hunting the wren is a favourite pastime on Christmas Day. The hunting is performed with two sticks, one of which is used to beat the bushes, and the other to throw at the bird. Mr. Yarrell mentions that "it was the boast of an old man who died at the age of a hundred, that he had hunted

the wren for the last eighty years, on Christmas Day." On St. Stephen's Day (December 26th), the children used to exhibit the slaughtered birds on an ivy-bush, decked with ribbons of various colours, and to carry them about, singing—

> "The wren! the wren! the king of birds!
> The best of all that live in the furze."

How readily the lines of that rural old song ring upon the ear whenever the tapping of the woodpecker is heard—

> "Every leaf was at rest, and I heard not a sound,
> But the woodpecker tapping in the hollow beech tree."

The generality of woodpeckers are beautiful birds. and some naturalists say that the tapping noise they make is the pairing call, Mr. Bachelor Woodpecker knocking at the door until Miss Woodpecker answers. The male always begins this curious wooing; and on the female replying, a place is selected in which to build the nest. If it be necessary to excavate any portion of the tree in order to make the hole large enough to receive the nest, the pair labour and feed by turns until this is done. The largest of the British woodpeckers is the beautiful Green Woodpecker; its bill is two inches long, of a triangular shape, and a dark horn colour: the outer circle of the eye is white, surrounding another of red; the top of the head is of a bright rich crimson, which extends down the back part of the neck, and ends in a point behind; the eye is surrounded by a black space, and from each corner of the bill there is a crimson streak pointing downwards; the back and wing coverts are of an olive green; the rump yellow; the quill feathers are dusky, barred on the outer web with black and white; the bastard wing is spotted with white, while the sides of the head and all the under parts of the body are white, slightly tinged with green; the tail is marked with bars like the wings; the legs are greenish. The female differs from the male in not having the red mark from the corner of the mouth. This is the most common of the woodpecker genus in this country, and may be met with in most parts of this island, where it is readily discovered by its discordant note; and also by the noise it makes when seeking its food, which con-

sists entirely of insects, their eggs, and larvæ. When it discovers a tree that is decayed, it tries with its bill different places, till by the sound it finds out the part that requires the least labour; it then pecks with its bill till it arrives at the unsound portion, which generally affords a plentiful repast. The rapidity of the strokes is so great that they can scarcely be counted; and the motion of the head and neck so rapid as scarcely to be seen. The tongue is furnished with barbs, and a glutinous secretion, by means of which it can readily take up small substances, and convey them to its mouth. It also feeds

on beetles and ants, and is more frequently seen on the ground than other woodpeckers—and may often be found inserting its tongue into ant-holes, from which it draws out these insects. It will sometimes make an aperture in the side of an ant-hill with its bill and feet, and then feed on the insects and eggs at its leisure. They usually lay five or six eggs in the hollow of a tree, at the depth of two feet or more from the entrance. The young ones climb up and down the tree before they are able to fly; and famous sport they seem to have with one another, as if playing at hide-and-seek among the branches. The

rapidity with which the young woodpeckers run up and down a tree is amazing, and they retain so firm a hold on the bark with their tiny claws, as seldom to fall. To me there has always seemed something very solemn and soothing in the tapping sound the woodpecker makes amid the silence of a forest, it is so unlike all other sounds.

As Summer draws to a close, the generality of birds are very still, for both the robin and the wren are mostly quiet from the middle of July till towards the end of August, though the robin generally begins to sing again towards the end of the latter month. Very often a number of young birds, such as linnets, greenfinches, buntings, and other small birds, are seen flying together in large flocks in Summer, and some have thought that they have been driven off by the old birds; when they fly, it is in a direct line, as if under some strong influence. Nor do these sudden movements appear to have anything to do with migration, as they occur in species which never leave our island, nor is it plain that there is any reason for their removal, unless it be that they have become too numerous for the neighbourhood in which they were hatched, and, finding a deficiency of food, seek a new settlement.

During these flights Mr. Knapp says he has observed "a flock of finches and yellow-hammers basking in a hedge, and a hawk, after due consideration, apparently single out an individual. Upon its moving to its prey, some wary bird has given the alarm, and most of the little troop scuttle immediately into the hedge; but the hawk holds on its course, and darts upon a selected object. If baffled, it seldom succeeds upon another; and so fixed are its eyes upon this one individual, that, as if unobservant of its own danger, it snatches up its morsel at our very sides. A pigeon on the roof of a dove-cot seems selected from its fellows—the hawk rarely snatching at more than one terror-stricken bird. The larger species of hawks appear to employ no powers excepting those of wing, but pursue and capture by celerity and strength."

But the heat of Summer does not cause all the birds to become silent, even when the season is far advanced; among the excep-

tions are the chiff-chaff, which at other times only repeats the shrill and monotonous two notes which have gained it its name; this bird was heard by Mr. Jenyns, in July, to utter a singular kind of whistle, which it repeated several times in succession. Nearly all the young birds are hatched at this season; but Mr. Jenyns informs us he has found the nest of the tree-pipit (or, more probably, the meadow-pipit) on the grass as late as the middle of July. The tree-pipit, or titlark, is a kind of lark, the male bird of which has a very agreeable song; though, as Mr. Yarrell observes, it is perhaps more attractive from the manner in which it is given, than the quality of the song itself. He generally sings while perched on the top of a bush, or one of the upper branches of an elm-tree standing in a hedge-row, from which, if watched for a short time, he will be seen to ascend on quivering wing about as high again as the tree, then, stretching out his wings and expanding his tail, he descends slowly by a half-circle to the same branch from which he started, or to the top of the nearest other tree, singing the whole time: and so constant is this habit with him, that, if the observer does not approach too near so as to alarm him, the bird may be seen to perform this same evolution twenty times in half an hour. The titlarks walk on the ground, like the wagtails and the larks. The meadow-pipit is smaller than the other species; and, instead of singing on a tree, it places itself on a little hillock, or a large stone, and moves its tail up and down like a wagtail. This bird always builds in the grass, a little of which dried it lays over its nest to conceal it. The rock-pipit inhabits

low flat shores near the sea, where it feeds on marine insects, sometimes seeking its food close to the edge of the retiring tide, and may very often be found busily engaged in turning over and examining sea-weed, apparently in search of small crabs or other similar crustacea; in short, nothing seems to come amiss to it.

The whinchat is not a bird that appears to care much for company, but is rather partial to frequenting wild, lonesome heaths and solitary moors; it has next to no song, but only a simple monotonous note, and very much resembles the stone-chat, making its nest similar to that bird. It is generally seen in the same places during the summer months. The female lays five eggs, of a lightish blue, very faintly speckled with small rusty spots. In the northern parts of England, it disappears in winter; but its migration is only partial, as it is seen in some of the southern counties at that season. It feeds on worms, flies, and insects, and at the end of summer it is very fat, at which time it is said to be scarcely inferior in delicacy to the ortolan.

One of these birds, brought up from the nest by Mr. Sweet, used to sing the whole day through, and very often at night. It sang the notes of the whitethroat, redstart, willow-warbler, missel-thrush, and nightingale.

But linnets are universal favourites, and there are very few bird-lovers in the country that have not made captive one or another of this great variety of songsters. They also live a many years. If I err not, we kept one, which I captured when a boy, above a dozen years; and as it grew older, its colour became darker, until at last it was nearly black.

Linnets are birds of gentle dispositions, easily tamed, and capable of very great attachment to those who feed them: if taken young, the males can be taught to sing; but the females have no song, and the old males do not utter a note. The young may be made to imitate the songs of several other birds; and there have been instances in which they have been brought even to articulate a few words. In disposition, linnets are very gentle and docile, and much admired for their song, which is lively, and sweetly varied, and preferable to that of most other small birds, always excepting the blackcap.

The linnet builds its concealed nest in furze bushes, and the outside is made up of dry grass, roots, and moss, lined with hair and wool. The female lays four or five eggs, white, tinged with blue, and irregularly dotted with brown at the larger end: they breed generally twice in the year.

The linnet is partially migratory within the country, though the sexes do not separate in the same manner as the chaffinches. During winter, the birds resort to the lower grounds, especially to those near the sea-shore. They appear in considerable flocks; the young birds appear earliest, then the females, and lastly the full-grown males; which may be said to be the order of movement with all autumnal birds, how limited soever may be the distance to which they migrate.

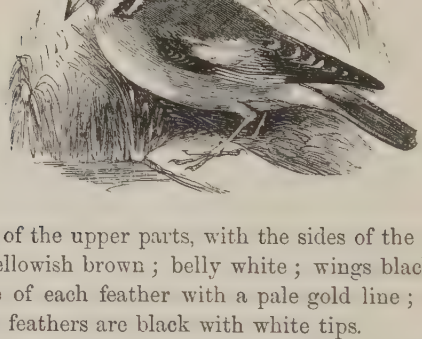
In the flocking time, when the male has lost the red on its breast, linnets fly very close and crowded, but with a smooth and straightforward flight.

The following lines by Burns are beautifully tender, and very descriptive of the linnet:—

"Within the bush, her covert nest
A little linnet fondly pressed,
The dew sat chilly on her breast
Sae early in the morning.
She soon shall see her tender brood,
The pride, the pleasure o' the wood,
Amang the fresh green leaves bedewed,
Awake the early morning."

There is great beauty in the idea of the bird bearing patiently the cold chilly dew of morning on its little breast, and being comforted with the thought that she soon will hear her little ones awakening the early morning with their songs.

Having described the nest of the goldfinch in Spring time, it is only necessary to give a brief description of the bird, whose bill is almost white with a blackish tip, and of a conical form; the forehead and throat a rich scarlet colour, with a black line passing between from the beak to the eyes, which are black; the cheeks and the lower part of the neck are white, and the top of the head black, which extends downwards, and divides the white on the cheeks from the white spot on the hinder part of the neck.



The whole of the upper parts, with the sides of the breast, are of a bright yellowish brown; belly white; wings black, marked in the middle of each feather with a pale gold line; while the six middle tail feathers are black with white tips.

The colours are nearly similar in both sexes, though those of the female are scarcely so vivid, and the wing coverts are inclined to brown. This bird is well known and highly esteemed in every part of the kingdom, and it is very common throughout the country. Buffon says—"Beauty of plumage, melody of song, sagacity and docility of disposition, seem all united in this charming little bird, which, were it rare, and imported from a foreign country, would be more highly valued: these qualities, together with its natural hardiness of constitution, all combine to make it a general favourite."

Its song, which may be heard at almost every season of the year, is brisk, lively, well kept up, and extremely musical and cheerful.

This bird is frequently trained to draw up its own food and water with a tiny chain and a fairy bucket, which it hauls to the level of its cage. The cheap-shaving barbers of London delight in teaching the goldfinch these tricks, and are very partial to getting up singing matches with birds.

The chaffinch sings very early in the morning, beginning in summer, Jenyns tells us, at three o'clock. It is sometimes called the bachelor, probably from Linnæus having given it the specific name of *cœlebs*, which signifies a bachelor, because in Sweden and other northern countries the females migrate in the winter to a milder climate, leaving only the male birds behind; and these males must naturally have appeared to Linnæus so solitary, that we cannot wonder he calls them bachelors. With us, however, as is observed in the "Journal of a Naturalist," the sexes do not separate at any season of the year, the flocks frequenting our barn-doors and homesteads in winter being composed of both males and females, which are easily distinguished from each other, the male bird being remarkable for the cleanliness and trimness of his plumage, which, without having any great variety or splendour of colouring, is so composed and arranged, and the white on his wings so brilliant, as to render him a very beautiful little creature. The female is as remarkable for the quiet, unobtrusive tintings of dress; and when she lies crouching on her nest, elegantly formed of lichens from the bark of the apple-tree and faded mosses, she would hardly be perceptible but for her little bright eyes that peep with suspicious vigilance from her covert. The same work informs us that in Gloucestershire these birds are generally called "twinks," from their constant repetition of one note resembling that word, when they are alarmed or in danger. In the midland counties they are called "pinks," and rarely by any other name. The female is a very careful builder; her nest, which is a very elegant one, being curiously flecked with a variety of richly-coloured lichens interwoven with wool, and lined with feathers and hair. She generally chooses

the fork of a tree, or the centre of a mass of ivy; but in some cases fixes her nest simply against the trunk of a tree, and in such a situation that it seems wonderful that the nest is not blown away by the wind or washed off by the rain. When the nest is closely examined, it generally excites astonishment from the neatness of its workmanship; for it is so firm and strong that it is difficult to pull it asunder. In summer the chaffinch lives principally upon insects, but in winter and very early spring it is apt to attack the seeds that are sown for the first vegetables, and also the first flowers: sometimes the snowdrops, winter aconites, and the little red archangel will be found with the petals of their flowers lacerated as soon as they unfold; and very often the chaffinch may be seen tearing the flowers asunder to get at the pistil, which it finds at their base.

The willow-warbler, though it does not soar high, sings as it flies, like the skylark. This bird builds such a curiously-shaped nest on the ground, that in the country they call it an oven. Those who keep guns and have gardens would never shoot this handsome bird if they knew that it neither touched bud nor seed, but lived entirely on insects.

"Peggy Whitethroat, come give us a note,"—as the country-people say when they see this pretty bird,—is another of our

Summer songsters, and belongs to the family of warblers: and a beautiful bird "Peggy" is, when seen darting up and down

like a flash of light; so clear and bright is its white throat and breast. It loves to build among brambles, where it is no easy matter to get at its greyish-white brown-spotted eggs. To hear a lot of these little warblers calling to and seeming to answer one another, is a great musical treat, especially when our favourite the blackcap and the Dartford warbler are among the number. Gilbert White was an excellent writer; but I do not think his ear was "finely attuned" to the music of birds, or he would never have called the warbling of the whitethroat "harsh and displeasing." It pours forth many a delightful note in its short jerky flight, as it rises up and down, and alights for a score or two of times together on the same twig,—seeming, as the country people say, "as if it couldn't keep still, to save its life."

The woodlark is a great favourite with country people, as it sings while flying, and also while perched on some picturesque branch; and for these reasons is preferred by some to the sky-

lark, although there is no comparison between the two for richness of music. It is, however, a beautifully-formed bird—there is such a graceful curve from the beak to the breast when its head is elevated. It builds on the ground, like the skylark, but bears little resemblance in form to the latter bird.

The wheatear is another sweet singer: although its song is not loud, there is something extremely pleasing in its softness; but I fear too many prefer picking its little bones to hearing it sing, for when in season, it is, as country people say, "fat as butter," and even epicures compare it for delicacy to the ortolan.

It is pleasant to sit on some little dry mole-hill, now purple with aromatic wild thyme, while all around the heather—the Summer livery of treeless wastes—begins to blush with bloom, and listen to these winged choristers antheming in bush and brake. Yet all these millions of little flowers too often only arrest the eye for a moment and are thought of no more; but let us take any one, no matter how common, and examine it minutely, and we shall be struck by the grace and beauty of its form. Even the wayside elder, that throws its flowers over almost every stagnant ditch and dusty hedge, whose cream-like bunches of flowers we just glance at and then pass on, if examined separately, will be found beautifully constructed: draw off a separate blossom, place it upon the palm of the hand, and you will see a marble-looking tripod, standing upon its ivory feet, and presenting an exquisite concave, a five-starred cup of pearl, as chaste in shape as ever emanated from the brain of a Grecian sculptor—a beautiful form which the hand of man has not yet imitated, and such as strikes but the eye of the poet, as he lies idly dreaming upon the grass, picking up, in his indolent mood, the nearest buds which the breeze blows within his reach. Nor is there a more beautifully-marked flower in the garden, than the pencilled geranium that grows wild, or any flower that wears a more delicate golden hue than the yellow, wild, wayside snapdragon.

In green lanes and quiet shady places the blue speedwell is still seen lingering, as if loth to shake off its azure flowers; as if it still stood listening to the lisping of the young birds which were beginning to climb and flutter among the green hedgerows. The centaury, with its pink-starred flowers, now also puts forth its elegant bloom; and the tall wood betony heaves up its rich rose-hued blossoms above the scarlet cup of the time-keeping pimpernel, which opens its lowly but dazzling flowers at its feet.

Either in the golden noon of day, or when seen in the silver glimmer of moonlight, the whole face of the country now wears a most beautiful appearance: here the corn is already beginning to show its ears, there the meadows are mown and cleared away;

farther on, the grass still stands in all its rich luxuriance of flowers. The tall bugle is in full bloom; and all the orchises, from those that resemble the bee to the butterfly, are in blossom.

Spring and Summer, with the birds and flowers they bring, give a life and beauty to those seasons, which we do not find in Autumn, with all its rich and varied colourings of foliage. Our sweetest poets have rivalled each other in singing the praises of Summer; our ancestors hailed her presence with many a forgotten merry-making; and however we may have abandoned their customs, still she enters as of old, ushered in by the warbling of birds. Now is the time, if thou art a lover of the country, to walk forth into the green fields and woods, and listen to their sweet piping, for this is the season of pleasure, which will soon be over: and where is there a more delightful picture than an expansive meadow, dotted with groups of little children, busied in gathering Summer flowers and mocking the singing of the birds? Here lies one laughing and tumbling in the sunshine, or burying his face in the long silken grass; while another runs to and fro in search of the largest buttercups, scarcely knowing which to pluck from among the countless millions; and a third is busied in sticking the heads of flowers upon a small branch, not content unless it can carry home a tree of flowers. How lively is the description given by the Italian poet Franco Sacchetti, of ladies gathering flowers in a wood, and drowning the very singing of the birds by their merriment.

> "Walking and musing in a wood, I saw
> Some ladies gathering flowers,—now this, now t'other,—
> And crying in delight to one another,
> 'Look here, look here!—what's this? a fleur-de-lis.
> Oh! get some violets there;—
> No, no,—some roses farther onward there;—
> How beautiful they are!
> Oh me! these thorns do prick so—only see!—
> Not that—the other—reach it me.
> Hallo, hallo! what is it leaping so?
> A grasshopper, a grasshopper!'"

And we can fancy what a scampering of pretty feet there would be on the appearance of the field-cricket. Ladies are general lovers

"Of every thing that pretty bin,"

and to them we are indebted in a great measure for those excellent exhibitions of flowers which are annually shown—they themselves being no small attraction,—

"Breathing flowers of beauty."

Nor is the singing of birds the only out-of-door charm that gives a change to the scene, for the heaths now wear a gorgeous livery: the red ferns are bursting forth, and the yellow gorse is hung with bellied baskets of gold; while hundreds of other flowers show their starry eyes among the dark moss under shady hedges or upon shelving banks.

But of all the spots in which to listen to the singing of birds in Summer, I know of none more beautifully described than in the following extract from that quaint old word-painter, Bergaric:—

"You enter a walk with fine avenues, in figure like a star: the oaks that compose it make one with ecstasy admire the height of their tops, raising one's eyes from the root to the column, then precipitating them down again. One doubts whether the earth bears them, and whether or no they carry not the earth at their roots: you would think that their proud heads are forced to bend under the weight of the heavenly globes, which burden they with groaning support; their arms stretched towards heaven, embracing it, seem to beg of the stars their influences altogether pure, and to receive them before they have at all lost their innocence in the bed of the elements. There on every side the flowers, having had no other gardener but Nature, send a sharp breath, that quickens and satisfies the smell. The sweet innocence of a rose on the eglantine, and the glorious azure of a violet under the sweetbriars, leaving us not the liberty of choice, make us judge that they are both one fairer than the other. The spring there composes all the seasons; there no venomous plant buds, but her breath soon betrays her safety; there the brooks relate their travels to the pebbles; there a thousand feathered songsters wake the listening echoes with their songs.

"On one side two walks discover themselves, whose continued green, frames an emerald, too big for the sight: the confused mixture of colours that Summer fastens to a million of flowers scatters the changes of one another, and their tincture is so pure that one may well judge that they get so close to one another only to escape the amorous kisses of the wind that courts them.

"One would now take this meadow for a very calm sea; but when the least zephyrus comes to wanton there, 'tis then a proud ocean full of waves, whose face furrowed with frowns threatens to swallow up those little fools. But, because this sea has no shore, the eye, as if affrighted to have run so long without finding any coast, quickly despatches the thought to the end of the world; and the thought, being doubtful too, doth almost persuade himself that this place is so full of charms, that it hath forced the heavens to unite themselves to the earth. In the midst of this so vast and yet so perfect carpet, runs in with silver bubbles and streams a rustic fountain, who sees the pillows of her head enamelled with jessamines, orange-trees, and myrtles; *and the little flowers that throng round about would make one believe that they dispute who shall view himself in the stream first.* Seeing her face so young and smooth as it is, which discovers not the least wrinkle, 'tis easy to judge she is yet in her mother's breast; and those great circles which she binds and twines herself, by reverting so often upon herself, witness that 'tis to her grief and against her will that she finds herself obliged to go from her native home (the streams leaving the fountain reluctantly). But above all things I admire her modesty, when I see her (as ashamed to be courted so near her mother) murmur and thrust back the bold hand that touches her. The traveller that comes hither to refresh himself, hanging his head over the water, wonders 'tis broad day in his horizon when he sees the sun in the antipodes, and never hangs over the bank but he's afraid to fall into the firmament."

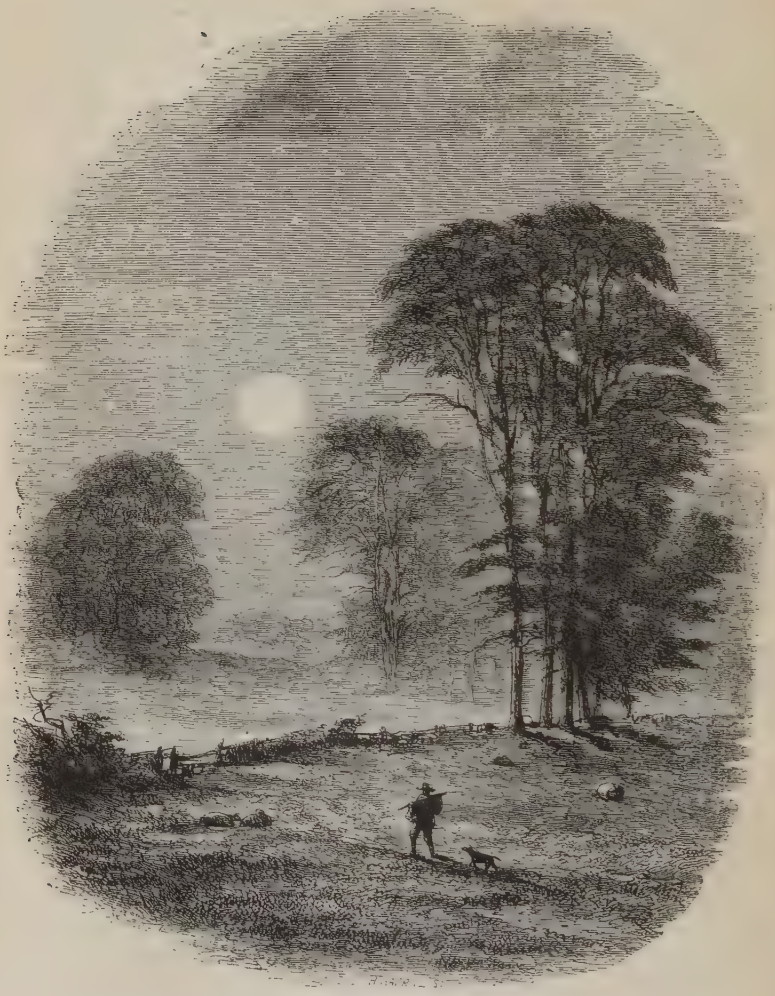
Our readers will not have forgotten the beautiful description of birds singing, already given at the opening of "Birds in Spring," from this quaint old writer.

It is only in the beginning of Summer that the songs of wild

birds are heard in perfection; and those who are interested in the subject will be amused to find, as we have before remarked, what very different sounds the same birds can produce. The call-note of each bird is quite distinct from its sharp cry or note of fear; and both, again, are different from the full melodious song of the male while the female is sitting on her nest. But I must, even under the charge of repeating the subject,

again allude to the nightingale, if only for the sake of the following beautiful morsel from Izaak Walton, who says it "breathes such sweet, loud music out of its little instrumental throat, that it might make mankind think that miracles had not ceased. He, that at midnight, when the very labourer sleeps securely, should hear, as I have very often, the clear airs, the sweet descant, the natural rising and falling, the doubling and redoubling of that sweet voice, might well be lifted above the earth, and say, 'Lord, what music hast thou provided for the saints in heaven, when thou affordest bad men such music on earth?'" When the nightingale has once begun to sing, it is very difficult to make it stop. Even a stone thrown into the bush has no effect; and an attempt to seize the bird will only make the song cease for a few moments, until it has found a more secure position.

Towards the close of May the female nightingale makes her nest, generally of oak leaves lined with dry grass, and places it on the ground, among materials of the same nature as those of



which it is composed, so that it can scarcely be seen, in which she lays four or five eggs, of a dark brown or dusky green; and as soon as these are hatched, the male ceases to sing; and,

instead of doing so, makes a fearful noise like the croaking of a frog. "The croaking of the nightingale, at the end of May, and in June," says Knapp, "is not occasioned by the loss of voice; but by a change of note—a change of object. His song ceases when his mate has hatched her brood; vigilance, anxiety, caution, now succeed to harmony, and his croak is the hush, the warning of danger or suspicion, to the infant charge and the mother-bird."

And here are a few lines we wrote while listening to the nightingale in the moonlight, many long summers ago :—

Sweet Nightingale! well doth thy lovely song
Accord with the hush'd breath of moonlight hours;
The green old trees thou warblest now among
Seem listening silent as the folded flowers,
A mute-lipp'd audience all, who bow profound
Beneath the whispering breeze that bears so sweet a sound.

What countless years, grey on the scroll of time,
Hath thy rich music charm'd the ancient earth!
When Eden's rosy vales were free from crime,
Even before the dark-brow'd Cain had birth,
Thy song was heard, bringing to Eve repose,
When her long unbound locks droop'd o'er the thornless rose.

That thou wert once a woman we believe,
Or such rich music never had been thine.
Poor bird! thou doubtless hadst much cause to grieve,
And vowed'st a vow at Melody's sweet shrine,
Before the echoing altar, through the night,
To keep harmonious watch, and warble back the light.

The moon, the stars, darkness, the oldest gloom,
Are all familiar with thy witching lay:
The brook, the trees, the Summer's opening bloom,
The silent wood, the blushing dawn of day—
These all have heard thee, and old forests dim,
Ere trod by man, rung back thy soft and silvery hymn.

In a work which was lately placed in my hands, entitled "Illustrations of Instinct deduced from the Habits of British Animals," there are some striking instances almost proving that animals are gifted with a reasoning power, which, though inferior to that of man, clearly shows that they at least form a link in that great intellectual chain which extends from the created to

the Creator; and I feel it a duty to recommend this interesting book to all lovers of Nature. The following extract will go far to prove that, what to the human eye may appear useless or unnecessary, will be found to answer a wiser end than that of mere ornament; and I am sure my readers will look upon the gaudy plumage of the peacock with other thoughts than that it is nothing more than a "luxuriance of Nature," after reading the following brief extract:—

"The tail of the peacock is of a plain and humble description, and seems to be of no other use besides aiding in the erection of the long feathers of the loins: while the latter are supplied at their insertion with an arrangement of voluntary muscles, which contribute to their elevation, and to the other motions of which they are capable. If surprised by a foe, the peacock presently erects its gorgeous feathers; and the enemy at once beholds starting up before him a creature which his terror cannot fail to magnify into the bulk implied by the circumference of a glittering circle of the most dazzling hues, his attention at the same time being distracted by a hundred glaring eyes meeting his gaze in every direction. A hiss from the head in the centre, which in shape and colours resembles that of a serpent, and a rustle from the trembling quills, are attended by an advance of the most conspicuous portion of this bulk; which is in itself an action of retreat, being caused by a receding motion of the body of the bird. That must be a bold animal which does not pause at the sight of such an object; and a short interval is sufficient to ensure the safety of the bird: but if, after all, the enemy should be bold enough to risk an assault, it is most likely that its eagerness or rage would be spent on the glittering appendages, in which case the creature is divested only of that which a little time will again supply. A like explanation may be offered of the use of the long and curious appendages of the head and neck of various kinds of humming-birds, which, however feeble, are a pugnacious race."

But in spite of the instinct of birds, and the courage they display in defending their young, yet numbers of the latter perish during the absence of the parent-birds, and through

being left unprotected. The old birds have frequently to make long journeys in search of food; and, while they are away, the young ones fall into the clutches of some of their many enemies, who are ever on the watch. The parent-birds, also, from the intentness with which they pursue their occupation, frequently run into dangers which, under other circumstances, they would have avoided, and are pounced upon by the sparrow-hawks and other birds of prey, which seem instinctively to know that it is a favourable moment for their attacks. In some cases the unfortunate birds appear to see their danger, but to be unable to avoid it; and in the "Journal of a Naturalist" a fact is related which seems to prove that the powers of some of the smaller birds are completely subdued by the presence of an enemy:—"A beautiful male bullfinch," says Mr. Knapp, "that sat pecking the buds of a blackthorn by my side, when I was overlooking the work of a labourer, suddenly uttered the instinctive moan of danger, but made no attempt to escape into the bush, seemingly deprived of the power of exertion. On looking round, a sparrow-hawk was observed on motionless wing, gliding rapidly along the hedge, and, passing me, rushed on its prey with undeviating certainty."

But the hawks have not always the best of it; for there is one fact on record of a large hawk pouncing upon and carrying off a weasel; but while in the air, the weasel eat his way into the hawk, killed it, and, when the bird fell, the weasel ran away apparently uninjured.

The following interesting account of a water-hen's attachment to her young is related by Mr. Waterton:—"In 1826, I was helping a man to stub some large willows near the water's edge. There was a water-hen's nest at the root of one of them. It had seven eggs in it. I broke two of them, and saw that they contained embryo chicks. The labourer took up part of the nest, with the remaining five eggs in it, and placed it on the ground, about three yards from the spot where we had found it. We continued in the same place for some hours afterwards, working at the willows. In the evening, when we went away, the old water-hen came back to the nest. Having no more

occasion for the labourer in that place, I took the boat myself the next morning, and saw the water-hen sitting on the nest. On approaching the place, I observed that she had collected a considerable quantity of grass and weeds, and that she had put them all round the nest. A week after this I went to watch her, and saw she had hatched ; and, as I drew nearer to her, she went into the water with the five little ones along with her."

LIFE OF SUMMER.

How Summer was warmed into life by her sister Spring is shown in a beautiful old word-painting by Gawain Douglas, who was appointed Bishop of Dunkeld, in Scotland, nearly three centuries and a half ago. It is worthy of a place in the same

gallery in which I have already hung up a few rich pictures from Bergaric, Overbury, and Izaak Walton, and stands second to none for high finish and exquisite colours; for Warton—whose modern version of this old poet I have followed—did greater service than he has hitherto obtained credit for, in drawing attention to the forgotten works of many of our old bards, whose descriptions of rural scenery have never been excelled by the poets of modern times. It must be borne in mind, that up to the period when this poetical old Bishop wrote, there were but few works at all worthy of the name of poetry in either the English or the Scottish language,—that when we have put down the names of Chaucer, Gower, Occleve, Lydgate, and the author of "Piers Plowman," we have called over nearly every name in the muster-roll of English poetry prior to the period of Gawain Douglas. Further, that until the appearance of Lord Sackville's "Mirror of Magistrates," and Spenser's "Fairy Queen," there was no poet worthy of a place beside Chaucer, saving the Bishop of Dunkeld; and that between the "Canterbury Tales" and the "Mirror of Magistrates," Gawain Douglas stands alone as a word-painter of poetry; nor was he ever equalled until the star of Spenser arose, and shone brightly on the dreary blank, that had stood so long without a single ray of true poetical light.

After this introduction, I have only to leave the following splendid pictures to stand on their own merits; for there will need no second glance to prove that they are the work of a genius:—

"Fresh Aurora, the wife of Tithonus, issued from her saffron bed and ivory house. She was clothed in a robe of crimson and violet colour; the cape vermilion and the border purple. She opened the windows of her Summer hall, overshadowed with roses and filled with balm of nard. At the same time the crystal gates of heaven were thrown open to illume the world. It was glorious to see the winds appeased, the sea becalmed, the soft season, the serene firmament, the still air, and the beauty of the watery scene. As Summer sprang into life, the silver-scaled fishes on the gravel, gliding hastily, as it were, from the heat, o. seen through clear streams, with fins shining brown as cinnabar,

and chisel tails, darted here and there. Her new lustre enlightening all the land beamed on the small pebbles on the sides of rivers, and on the strands, which looked like beryl; while the reflection of Her rays played on the banks in variegated gleams. The bladed soil was embroidered with various hues. Both wood and forest were darkened with boughs, which, reflected from the

ground, gave a shadowy lustre to the red rocks. Town, turrets, battlements, and high pinnacles of churches, castles, and of every fair city, seemed to be painted, and, together with every bastion and story, expressed Her shape on the plains. The glebe, fearless of the northern blasts, spread out its broad bosom. The corn-crops and the new-sprung barley reclothed the earth with a gladsome garment. The variegated vesture of the valley covered the cloven furrow, and the barley-lands were diversified with flowery weeds. The meadow was besprinkled with rivulets, and the fresh moisture of the dewy night restored the herbage which the cattle had cropped in the day. The blossoms in the blowing garden trusted their heads to the protection of Her shadowing beauty. Rank ivy-leaves overspread the walls of the rampart. The blooming hawthorn clothed all the thorns in flowers. The budding clusters of the tender grapes hung end-long by their tendrils from the trellises. The germs of the trees unlocking, expanded themselves into the foliage of Nature's tapestry. There

was a soft verdure after balmy showers. The flowers smiled in various colours on the bending stalks; some red, others watchet like the blue and wavy sea, speckled with red and white, or bright as gold. The daisy embroidered Her flowery coronet. The grass stood embattled with banewort: the seeded down flew from the dandelion. Young weeds appeared among the leaves of the strawberries and gay gilliflowers. The rosebuds, putting forth, offered their red vernal lips to Her to be kissed, and diffused fragrance from the crisp scarlet that surrounded their golden seeds. Lilies, with white curling tops, showed their crests open. The odorous vapour moistened the silver webs that hung from the leaves. The plain was powdered with round dewy pearls. From every bud, scion, herb, and flower bathed in liquid fragrance, the bee sucked sweet honey. The swans cla-

moured amid the rustling reeds, and searched all the lakes and grey rivers where to build their nests. The red bird of the sun lifted his coral crest, crowing clear among the plants and bushes, picking his food from every path, and attended by his wives Toppa and Partlet. The painted peacock, with gaudy plumes, unfolded his tail like a bright wheel. enshrouded in his silver

feathers, resembling the marks of the hundred eyes of Argus. Among the boughs of the twisted olive the small birds framed their artful nests, or along the thick hedges, or rejoiced with their merry mates in the tall oaks. In the secret nook, or in the clear windows of glass, the spider full busily wove her sly net to

ensnare the gnat or fly. Under the boughs that screen the valley, or within the pale-enclosed park, the nimble deer trooped in ranks; the harts wandered through the thick wood-shaws, and the young fawns followed the dappled does. Kids slipped through the briars after the roes, and in the pastures and leas the lambs bleated to their dams. The ringdoves cooed in the tall copse; the starling whistled her varied descant; the sparrow chirped in the clifted wall; the goldfinch and linnet filled the skies; the cuckoo cried, the quail twittered; while rivers, shaws, and every dale resounded; and the tender branches trembled on the trees at the song of the birds and the buzzing of the bees;—all rejoicing that Summer had again come to life."

In honour of the memory of this great poet, it shall now be my task to attempt a companion picture, both in prose and poetry, of the Death of Summer, and not without the hope that in future years it may be hung, side by side, in some Gallery of

Rural Pictures containing the "Life of Summer," by Gawain Douglas.

"An earthly steed was yoked, they say,
Unto Apollo's golden grey,
To draw the burning Car of Day,
But stumbled on the starry way."

DEATH OF SUMMER.

"Ring out the bells, and let the mass be said,
For Summer's dead."—*Old Song.*

WHEN Summer arrived at the full womanhood of her beauty, and walked the earth robed in her richest attire, her loveliness was stamped with a majesty such as we saw not on the timid countenance of her sweet sister, Spring; there was a deeper blush on her cheek, and a warmer olive on her brow, through wandering among the thickets of roses, and basking in the lily-tanning sunshine, than was ever found on the features of the April maiden, whose brow was wreathed with snowdrops and

early violets. But the low whisper that ran through the yellow corn now told her that the leaves would neither become greener, nor grow longer; that she had finished the beautiful bowers which she had been so long building up, and which the birds had sung in, and the bees murmured about, and the flowers so thickly enwreathed that, through pressing one upon another, many of the sweetest had already died. She knew that she should ere long sleep in the cold moonlight under the falling leaves, for she felt that her time of departure was drawing near. Sometimes she sat within her flower-roofed arbour, with her head resting on her hand, and marvelled to herself why she heard not so many familiar voices as were wont to greet her in the golden dawn, and when the day threw over its face a veil of blue twilight; and an unconscious sigh, which just waved the drooping jasmine, would escape her, as she wondered why they were hushed. She looked up to the sky for the lark, and into the tree for the cuckoo, and when the day died, listened for the

heart-thrilling song of the nightingale, but they were gone—the lark was grieving somewhere; the grey cuckoo had crossed the sea; and the nightingale was singing to the sun-dyed maidens of the South, leaving his blue-eyed Summer to mourn alone in

the hawthorn-girded valleys of breezy England. She sat and sighed, as she thought that the time when she must also depart was now near at hand.

She felt that Autumn would soon come and sit down to the riper banquet which she left behind; and forget the fairer guest who had graced that board, and upon whose grave he would throw his fallen leaves disregarded. But she knew that his time would also come, and grim Winter rattle the icicles that hung from his beard, as he reigned amid the

"Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang."

But Summer now ruled in all her full-blown beauty over earth and sea and sky; places that before appeared brown and desolate, had caught the warm, rose-like shadow that she threw down, and were covered with the blush of the crimson heather. The convolvuluses dressed up the hedges with their long trails of flowers, that they might still look beautiful after the hawthorns had shaken off the pearly-tinted buds of May; even the brown banks were gay with the mallows, and hidden nooks were lighted with flowering weeds; as if Summer, in her boundless wealth, left no spot unvisited, no corner without a bell or a blossom, for the belted bee to hum over, or the pea-bloom-like butterfly to swing

upon. On the water, the white lily floated like a queen on her green barge, and retired into her crystal cabin when the curtains

of day were drawn. The lady-like woodbine leant her fair face over the woodland walk; while the bees alighted upon her sun-stained fingers, and fed upon the honey which she held in her hand. The tall foxgloves stood here and there like torch-bearers, and lighted up the shady places with a ruby flame; while the rich meadow-sweet filled the whole air around with the fragrance that streamed from her deep cream-coloured bloom. Summer had roofed her hall with green, and trained sweet-scented creepers around its pillars; then scattered the floor with flowers for us to tread upon, the pattern of which she showed by golden lights let in here and there through the network of the boughs. Yet all her work had been done silently: the silver showers were her threads, and the trembling sunbeams her shuttle, which the winds threw to and fro. She formed her clouds of the same texture.

Her tall trees were the work of many a day, many a night, and many a year. She came and went; yet no human eye could tell when she began or when she ended, or perceive what she had done. The bud came, but no one knew how; it opened, no one could tell when; the leaves became longer every day, but no human eye could see them grow; for she could shelter herself within the rounded dew-drop, and there, hidden, carry on her great work. Those tiny stems which the smallest insect could at first pierce, at her bidding became harder and thicker every day, until at last only the dreaded thunderbolt could rend them; for it wearied the human arm to hack and hew through their gigantic limbs. Man wiped the beaded drops from his brow, and laid down wearied through trying to cut asunder what she had woven from the shine, the shower, and the breeze. The dark clouds drew up to admire, and changed to silver as they sailed slowly over her topmost branches; and the stars looked brightly down through her winding staircase of leaves.

Then she descended,—and having placed plumes on the heads and trembling drops in the ears of the grasses, she diapered the interstices between with fanciful patterns of flowers. She placed in her shuttle the gold that formed the buttercup, and the silver from which she wrought the form of the daisy; running with a

trembling thread the blue of the harebell between, and spotting the ground with the scarlet pimpernel. The bee came, and made a brazen belt out of the yellow of the buttercup; the butterfly found the silver-colouring of his wings in the daisy; the dragon-fly stole his deep-blue from the nodding harebell; and

the tiger-moth stained his wings in the blood-red font of the pimpernel: and so, plumed and full of life, Summer threw her works into the air, and smiled at the creation which had sprung from her idle moods, when for pastime she formed the flowers. A thousand little insects crept into the foldings of her leaves, and hid themselves among the pollen that fell upon the petals. Whatever she touched became instinct with life. Not an insect's egg could rest on a leaf that she had spread out without feeling a stir of life within it—a restless fluttering that shot out into wings, by which the half-unconscious body was at last borne away. Even the feathered seeds which blew off at her slightest breath, rose into the air and looked about for room to alight; and wheresoever they settled down, there sprang up a new generation of flowers. Time tried in vain to destroy them; he mowed them down with his merciless scythe, and when they had withered, buried them deep in the earth; but his labour was useless! there was an immortality in whatever Summer had once touched; and from the soil which he upturned another race arose, a new

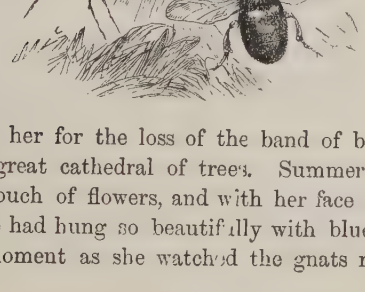
family of flowers came to life, and desolate places blushed with beauty. Pity that she herself must die!

The birds which she had carefully covered in her leafy arbours had long since flown, and only the empty nests remained—

deserted houses from which the tenants had fled. Those that sang to her like little angels among the trees, were now either silent or had ventured across the broad seas to search for a younger Summer than the one they had left behind. She had seen them fly away one after the other, and noticed how the trees became silent, and the hedge-rows hushed, and the deep woods less audible, and the noise of the brooks, whose running had hitherto been drowned by the bursting band that beat time to the rocking of the reeds and the bowing of the bulrushes and the silvery shivering which the willows made, fell louder upon her ear; and she caught the low lapsing of the smallest ripples that fretted among the pebbles, and which she had never heard while her feathered friends sang to soothe her. The high green chambers in her tallest trees, which commanded such a look-out over rounded hills and sloping upland, broad moor and flowery valley, were empty, for the daughters of music had fled. The little robin and the tiny wren pecked about and peeped at

her, and bid her be of good heart, for they would never desert her, though she might not have a leaf to wear, nor a flower wherewith to deck herself.

And the little harvest-mouse, the smallest of created quadrupeds, threaded its way in-and-out amid the flowers that twined her hair, and whispered in her ear, that it would never forsake her; that but for her it would never have had the tall corn to climb up, the stems of which she had made strong enough to bear its weight, and the weight of all its little ones, whose nest it affixed half-way up the eary corn, and from which it sat and peeped out, watching them while they were learning to climb. Then, the bees—seeing that she was sad—came humming around her, and thanked her in grateful murmurs for all she had given them; for the miles of hawthorns which she had hung with the blossoms of May, and the pavilions of roses she had erected, and the bowers of honeysuckle she had trailed for them to shelter in from the burning sun, and the carpets of clover she had spread out for them to rest upon, when they were wearied with flying. They offered her their sweetest honey, but she shook her head, and refused to be comforted; so they flew back to their hives, there to hide themselves, and mourn; for they knew that Summer must soon die. Then, thousands of little insects flew about her—they blew their buzzing horns, and hoped by their feeble



music to solace her for the loss of the band of birds that used to sing in her great cathedral of trees. Summer threw herself back on her couch of flowers, and with her face turned to the sky—which she had hung so beautifully with blue and silver—smiled for a moment as she watched the gnats rising up and

down, as they ran over the strings of the airy instruments on which they played, and which sounded remote or near just as they rose or fell. The scarlet-backed lady-birds spotted the overhanging leaves, and the mealy-winged moths peeped about with their curious eyes, and blundered against the glow-worms, who had not yet lit up their starry lamps. The large-eyed oxen gathered about her in silence, and the full-grown lambs looked with gentle faces upon her; while the tall hayricks—altars on which so many of her flowers had been offered up—threw a shadow across her feet, and over the flocks and herds that stood below. Summer looked up to where her piled flowers and withered grasses rose like a pyramid, and thought that, but for such store as she had there provided at the sacrifice of her own life, the cattle must perish in the long dark Winter that would settle down upon the earth, when she was laid in her grave. And as she lay and mused, she seemed to become more reconciled to death, and thought it was better that she should die than that the fields should be silent, and neither the lowing of herds nor the bleating of flocks be again heard, when her sweet sister Spring awoke from her long sleep. Strange! that she could never see that sister's face, but that ever when she herself awoke from her long death-like sleep and looked from the summit of the eastern hills, she saw only the primrose-coloured garments of Spring, fading into the sunset of the far west, and that they never met

> "On hill, in dale, forest, or mead,
> By pavèd fountain, or by rushy brook,
> Or on the beachèd margent of the sea,
> To dance [their] ringlets to the whistling winds."

Spring, too, had often turned her head to take a departing look at her sister Summer; but the rounded earth lay between them, and all she could see was her green kirtle, half-hidden by the opening leaves.

And so Summer lay musing with half-closed eyes, regardless of the flowers that were withering around her. She knew that she should never rise again, until the stir of other flowers awoke her; until she felt the daisies growing above her grave,

and the smell of the sweet violets scenting the earth. She folded her arms across her breast, and drew together unconsciously the flowers that blowed about her. Their bent heads met above her, and she lay half-buried beneath the blooms which she knew not she had thus inclosed. And so she died. She covered herself with a winding-sheet of her sweetest flowers—like the fabled Phœnix—self-consumed in the beauty of its own blaze. And there she lay, immolated on the flowery altar which she herself had reared. A fallow-deer from the wood came and stood over

her with mournful eyes, and the doe and little fawn that trotted by his side lay down, and burying their heads among the flowers, fell asleep by the fragrant death-bed of Summer. All night long the leaves dropped upon her with a measured fall, regular as the mournful tolling of a bell, one by one they fell, while the sighing of the low wind filled up the pauses between.

Youths and maidens and children came and looked upon the spot where she was laid, and wreathed the urn that was placed over her with flowers and richly-coloured leaves. The pattering

tears of the clouds fell upon them, as they came up in sad leaden-coloured garments, and bent over her to weep. The winds beat their wings in agony above her grave; and in their great despair threw themselves upon it, the clouds weeping all the while, and the leaves rushing together to see where she was laid; then lying down, and dying, above, around, and beside her—leaves came of every hue—

Red, green, and gold,
Ruins from her own bowers,
That almost looked as beautiful
As Summer's sweetest flowers.

Then the red-breasted robins stood upon the leafless branches, and chanted a low requiem over her grave, and thus ran the burthen of their song:—

THE DEATH OF SUMMER.

Oh! she was young and beautiful!
Strew the last roses on her grave;
Let no rude sounds disturb her rest,
But gentle branches o'er her wave—
Long swayings of the bramble flower,
Low whispers of the sweet woodbine,
With trails of cupped convolvules,
And Spring's own early eglantine.

Embower her with Nature's gems—
Sweet hips which the wild roses shed,
The misty purple of the sloe,
And berries of the holly red.
Leave her not bare and desolate;
But twine such plants around her urn
As show green through the Winter snow,
And will keep so till Spring return.

Then nail her down with daisy-buds,
They in good time will open white
And blow about her monument
In lettered lines of starry light.

Laburnums place beside her head,
They will not shrink from April's cold,
But over her stand sentinel,
In liveries of green and gold.

Plant crocuses around her grave,
Cowslips to catch the morning dew,
Pale primroses that peep about,
And blue-bells of the deepest blue;
That Spring may water them with tears,
And sighing, say, "I soon shall be
As she is now: then she may come,
Perchance, and do the same for me."

And Winter, as his end draws nigh,
Will breathe warm through his icy blast,
And turn the feathered flakes to flowers,
Then on her grave white snowdrops cast.
And in her sleep sometimes she'll dream
The swallow has come back again,
And sometimes 'mid the daisies hear
The tread of silver-footed rain.

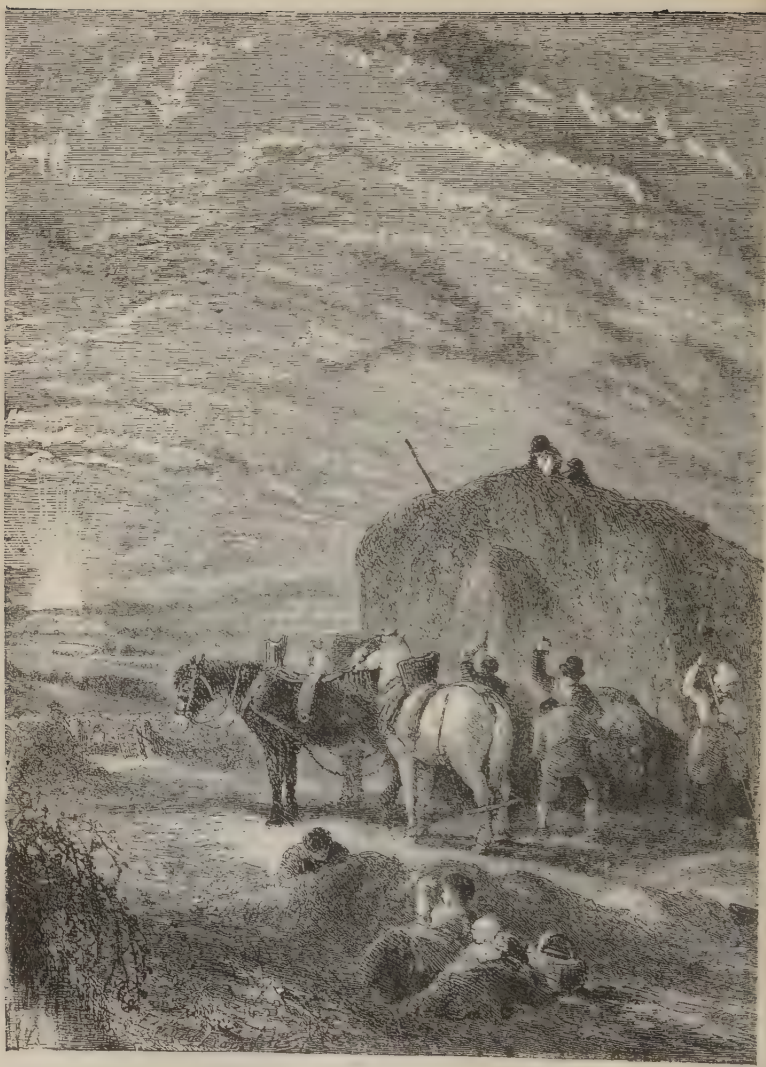
The throstle with his speckled breast,
The blackbird with his golden bill,
The lark that never seems at rest,
The cuckoo calling from the hill,
The bullfinch busy with the bloom,
The nightingale with leading notes,
Will shake the ashes in her urn,
Through shivering their dulcet throats,

As they all cry, "Awake! awake!"
Then she will rise from out her cell,
And ere her eyes are opened wide,
Inhale the fragrant hawthorn's smell.
Then she will deck her halls and groves
With many a gay and quaint device,
And scent the wide air every way
With perfumes brought from Paradise.

Sleep then! till Autumn gathers in
His ruddy fruits and ripened grain;
Till Spring has swept up Winter's snow:
Then, Summer! thou shalt wake again,

And all the earth once more rejoice.
The birds amid their woodland bowers
Shall sing all day,—and the brown bees
Murmur around thy throne of flowers.

T. M.



GOLDEN AUTUMN.

GOLDEN AUTUMN.

BEAUTY OF AUTUMN—AUTUMNAL LANDSCAPE—FALLING LEAVES—PICTURESQUE OBJECTS—ORCHARDS—SEA-SIDE SCENERY.

AUTUMN, but still with those bold, broad dashes of gold and green, so crossed and interwoven in the landscape as make it difficult to tell where the season of the plumy sheaf and waning leaf begins and the slow decay of Summer ends.

We stand now upon that neutral ground between the two seasons, which enables us to take a survey of both; we see

Summer clearing her Harvest Fields in haste, as if she had hardly time to retreat; we also see Autumn marching up the front of his forces, which show through the yellow and hectic openings of the forest, where the "sere and yellow leaves" lie ankle deep above the buried flowers. Nearly all the Summer birds are silent; numbers have left our island, and gone to seek another Summer over the sea, never, perhaps, again to return or think of her whose beauty Autumn is now trampling upon—who built them up green arbours and covered their nests with trailing flowers, and threw a thousand perfumes about the haunts of "these daughters of music" who have fled.

But although Summer is dead, and Golden Autumn will soon pass away, we shall not be left altogether desolate, for we have still stored up in the pages of our immortal poets Seasons that are ever green and golden, and flowery, and which can never die. And these we have but to open their green pages and look at, and all the land will again ring with music, while the trees shake their leaves in the sun, as before the "inward eye;" there comes a blinding shower of undying flowers; for Chaucer has shed a glory over our old winding highways in his "Pilgrimage;" and Spenser,

"Sole sitting by the shores of old romance,"

has hallowed the streams and tangling wildernesses of our forests; while Shakspeare the immortal has

"Warbled his native wood-notes wild,"

and rained such showers of golden music over the land as will never be dried up while a flower blooms or a stream flows; and Milton, the God-minded, has shaken the throne

"Where bald blind Homer smiled,"

and made the poetical sceptre tremble in the hands of the King of Song, as if afraid that his reign was ended. And in the pages of these "children of song" Summer will ever look as fresh throughout all time, as if not a rose of her beauty had faded, and the Golden Autumn never wane beyond the beauty which they have transfixed—there to remain for ever. Their trees can

never shed their leaves—their birds never become mute—nor their streams ever cease to flow.

> "When old age shall this generation waste,
> They shall remain, in midst of other woe
> Than ours; still friends to man, to whom each sayest,
> 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

The dark green leaves that garlanded the rosy Summer now begin to show upon their edges the waning yellow of Autumn; and on the skirts of the forest we can trace those rich hues which are too crimson to live long; that rise like the flushed roses on the consumptive cheek of the lovely maiden, looking too beautiful ever to be allied to death, although they are the Heralds of the Grave. In the oak, the elm, the chestnut, and the fir, we see the gloomy green, the burnished bronze, the fading yellow, and the dull red, lighted up between with masses of foliage that glitter like gold, all mingled and blended together so richly and harmoniously, that, in the distance, we cannot tell where the dusky green begins, nor the rounded yellow fades away; for leaves of all hues are now fast falling; the most beautiful to form a couch for Summer to lie down and die upon, while others remain behind until they are withered and shrunken by the cold and hollow winds of Autumn, then fall and bury her after she is dead. But there is yet work to be done in the fields; the great harvest has to be reaped and garnered; for now the sun-tanned sickle-bearers sally forth into the fields to cut down the golden grain which the Summer sun has ripened, and we will ere long follow them.

Still there is a stir of busy life in the country, the cattle are yet out in the fields feeding on the "after-mauth," as our forefathers called it, or the second crop of grass which springs up after the hay-harvest is gathered in, and the milkmaid's carol may yet be heard as she returns from her milking fields morning and evening.

Pleasant is it now to climb the verdant slope of some gentle hill that goes down with an easy descent into the valley, as if it had paused on its way to make a smooth slope here, and, lower

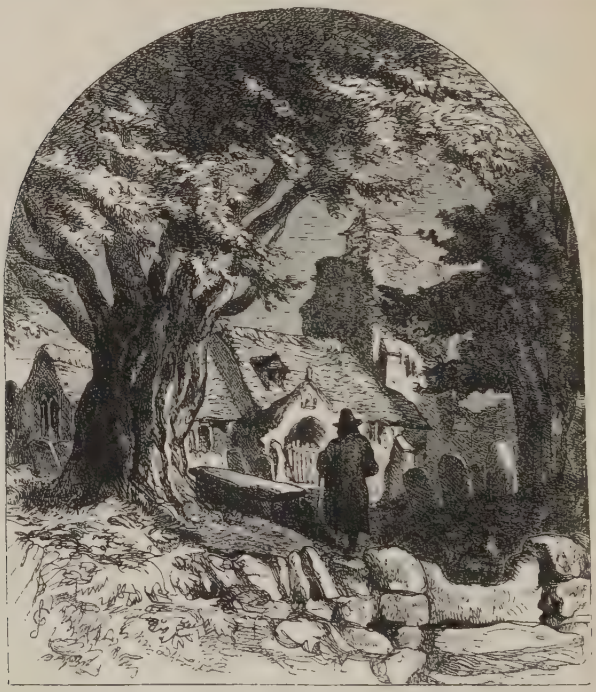
down, to leave a little upland, as if it there rested awhile, before it threw out the broad valley at its feet, leaving steps by which the wanderer might climb in after years, and view by degrees the

beauty of the workmanship of those invisible hands. Delightful is it to ascend these table-lands; one after the other, to pause

upon each easily-gained height, to raise ourselves just above the first corn-field, where the busy reapers are already at work, their rural and picturesque costumes forming a beautiful contrast to the yellow-waving and wide-spread field—to watch them half-buried a moment amid the drooping ears, then to see figure after figure slowly arise, and watch the ripe corn as it is tied with twisted bands into rounded sheaves, until, at last, the heavy shocks are gathered, and above the stubbly and furrowed lands heave up at equal distances little stacks of eary corn, which, with their ten thousand of plumy heads, are still looking cheerfully up towards heaven. Then to climb the next range, which commands a view, wide out across the valley, and to see patches of green and yellow in alternate contrast, dotted with gleaners and reapers—men, women, and children—sprinkled over the landscape, where horses are moving, and waggons laden with corn grind down the ridgy glebe, as they rock like ships upon a sea, over the uneven furrows, and, like them, seem to roll along without a sound; for neither the creaking of wheels, nor the tramping of hoofs, is heard from the green slope which we have ascended. Nearer at hand, yet still far out below our feet, we behold the thatched grange, peeping from its little nest of trees, and can see the long or rounded stacks slowly rising higher, as the waggons come full and glide away empty; for there are human figures busy upon the corn-ricks; and the end of the bough, which, but a few minutes before, seemed resting upon the sky, is shut out by the piled sheaves which rise up so slowly and silently, that we can just perceive them grow, by keeping the eye riveted upon the increasing pile.

Higher we climb to the topmost ridge, where the eye ranges over the whole outstretched scene, to where afar off the distant hills melt dimly into the sky; and the soft outline is lost in the silvery mist of the clouds. A spire and village, a lonely grange that seems to have wandered away by itself into the fields, are all mapped out beneath our feet; and the long hedgerows that bound the green pastures seem but higher masses of taller grass, with here and there a bush arising above them, for so are the trees dwarfed by the vast distance from which we gaze; and

where between the corn-fields the same dark boundaries run, they look like little banks of green rising in Spring along a yellow fallow, a sunlighted land, upon which no green thing hath as yet sprung up; amid which little cottages occasionally arise, whose sloping roofs seem almost to touch the verdureless ground, so deeply are they buried in that ocean of golden corn; and sometimes the head of a human figure peeps up, then is lost



again, as if something dark was washed slowly along, above the dreamy and yellow waves. But we must descend, and thread our way through the narrow lanes, where the high hedgerows have taken toll of the laden waggons as they passed; and here and there hung their boughs with drooping ears—a feast for the birds that yet linger behind, and occasionally cheer the fading

green of their summer chambers with a song. Up comes the great rumbling waggon, filling up the whole road above and below, and we are glad to scramble up a bank, or shelter in a gateway that leads to some field, to let it pass; or we meet it at the turning of a village, see the reflection of the sheaves cast for a few moments upon the cool bright pond; it then passes on by the low grey churchyard wall, where death is ever slowly gathering in his harvest;—round the two yew-trees which stand like gloomy sentinels at the gate, under the tall coffin-looking elms that shut out the turning of the road, and then is lost to the sight.

Fit images for the decaying year are these: a spot to stand in, and muse in for a long hour together, drawing comparisons from the leaves that fall upon the graves, and the dead that sleep below; but they

> "Do not hear the tempest rave,
> Nor mourning household shelter crave
> From Autumn winds that sweep each grave."

In a little work, which has never been thoroughly appreciated, entitled "The Mirror of the Months," the author says, "It is now that debateable ground of the year which is situated upon the confines of Summer and Autumn; it is dressed in half the flowers of the one, and half the fruits of the other; it has a sky and temperature all its own, which vie in beauty with those of the Spring. May itself can offer nothing so sweet to the senses, so enchanting to the imagination, and so soothing to the heart, as that genial influence which arises from the sights, the sounds, and the associations connected with an Autumn evening in the country, when the occupations and pleasures of the day are done. There is no delight equal to that felt by a true lover of Nature, when he looks forth upon her open face silently, at a season like the present, and drinks in that still beauty which seems to emanate from everything he sees, till his whole senses are steeped in a sweet forgetfulness. The whole face of Nature has undergone an obvious change. Everything is still green: but it is not the fresh and tender green of Spring, nor the full and satisfying, though somewhat dull green of Summer; but

many greens that blend all those belonging to the above-named seasons.

What a beautiful picture is now presented, when the numerous flock is driven to the fold as the day declines! its scattered members converging towards a point as they enter the narrow opening of their nightly inclosure, which they gradually fill and settle into, as a shallow stream runs into a bed that has been prepared for it, and there settles into a still pool. And again in the early morning, when the slender barrier that confines them is removed, they crowd and hurry out, gently intercepting each other; and as they get free, pour forth their white fleeces over the open field, as a lake that has broken its bank pours its waters over the adjoining land; in each case the bells and meek voices of the patient people making music as they move, and the shepherd standing carelessly by leaning on his crook—even as shepherds did in the vale of Arcady, leaving the care of the flock to their half-reasoning dogs.

Another picture of the season is a foreground; on one side a little shallow pond with two or three pollard-willows stooping over it; and on the other a low bank, before which stand as many more pollard-willows, with round trim heads set formally on their pillar-like stems; between all these the sunshine lying in bright streaks on the green ground, and made distinguishable by the straight shadows thrown by the thick stems of the trees. In the middle distance a moist meadow, level as a line, and on it half a dozen cattle; three lying at their ease, and chewing the sweet cud, two cropping the same, and one lifting up its grave matronly face and lowing out into the side distance; while, about the legs of all of them, a little flock of wagtails are glancing in and out merrily, picking up their delicate meal of invisible insects: and upon the very back of one of the ruminators, a pert magpie has perhaps perched herself. The extreme distance is half occupied by dim-seen willows, of the same stunted growth with those in front; and the rest shows indistinctly, and half-hidden by trees, a little village, its church-spire pointing to the sky. It is like Paul Potter, or Nature, for they are nearly the same.

There is a peculiar beauty about the fields in Autumn; where the hay has been cleared off early, and the second crops

of grass have sprung up. They look like a rich green velvet carpet, for there are now but few flowers to break up the sweep

of the smooth emerald surface. On the trees, too, we behold a new crop of leaves, as tender and delicate in hue as those which first burst from the buds and trembled in the mild breezes of May. It seems as if the foliage of Summer and Spring were blended together, for the buds wear the same pale April green. At a first glance, the young leaves do not strike the eye: you imagine that the sunshine falls brighter upon these patches of foliage, until you see that it is impossible for the sun-rays to light up the branches in such a direction; and it is then that you discover this new bursting of tender leaves—that you have found out a new delight.

Nothing can exceed the beauty of the sky at this season of the year. The deep blue of boasted Italy cannot surpass the azure vault in which the silver clouds now seem to lie and dream. As we gaze, we call up those visionary palaces which rise up in the pages of the Arabian Nights, and almost fancy that we see thrown open the great ruby-pillared and golden gates of heaven. And the moonlight, though no longer cheered by the dulcet harmony of the nightingale, has a peculiar charm at this season; nor is there a grander object than the broad round harvest moon, heaving up bright and full above high green-shouldered hills, while

> "All heaven and earth are still, though not in sleep,
> But breathless, as we grow when feeling most."

Ladybirds are now seen in hundreds; and a few years ago clouds of them came over from the coast of France, and were swept from off our piers into the sea. There is also a beautiful little blue butterfly now abroad, that goes flitting like a pea-blossom from flower to flower, and sometimes seems to mount the harebell as if only to rock itself for a few moments, and then again depart to alight upon the distant heather. Sometimes the woodlark rises in this "season of mist and mellow fruitfulness," singing like the lark as it soars, though oftener while perched on a spray. Nor is the blackbird or thrush wholly silent; while the linnets and whinchats keep up their merry song, as if Summer, instead of departing, was only just making her appearance. But this chorus only breaks out when the weather is unusually

fine, and Autumn in its infancy. Amongst moths, the spotted wood-leopard may now be seen; and the goat-moth, whose larva pierces the knotted ball of the giant oak, is now abroad: while the splendid tiger-moth expands its gorgeous wings; but these are only to be found in spots where

> "the birch
> Displays its glossy stem amidst the gloom
> Of alders and jagged fern, and evermore
> Waves her light pensile foliage, as she woo'd
> The passing gale to whisper flatteries."

Still, whichever way we look, we see there is a change in the aspect of Nature, a furrowing as of deep thought upon the woods from which the foliage is ever falling; it seems as if a silent spirit walked abroad, and held only communion with our hearts, —as if, in the down-pattering leaves, we again heard those grand and solemn passages of Scripture, which tell us that "we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And all thou hast shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree. For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf falleth, as oaks when they cast their leaves; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them,

and they shall flee." How beautiful are these similes! and hundreds of others equally grand are scattered over the Bible,

> "Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks
> In Vallombrosa, where th' Etrurian shades
> High over-arch'd embower."

The hedgerows are no longer covered with trailing flowers as they were a month or so ago, and what little show the woodbine makes bears no comparison to the sun-streaked bloom it presented to Summer, for the blush and beauty are gone. With an exception or two, what few flowers we see seem old, as if they had long since passed their youth; and as for perfume, they have none: the Autumn violet is scentless as a stone. But the sunsets at this season of the year are gorgeous, and, were there no other cause, justify our old poets in calling it Golden Autumn; sunsets which, flashing upon ripe cornfields and the fading foliage of trees, make the whole look as if heaven and earth were formed out of the purest gold. Travellers have said that nowhere in the world do the sunsets appear so beautiful as those seen in England in Golden Autumn; and this they attribute to effects produced by the surrounding sea.

To my eye a herd of deer never appear more beautiful than when seen, amid the changing foliage of Autumn, either standing

or lying down. They harmonise with the brown russet hue of the fern, above which their lofty antlers and graceful necks arise with a forest-like majesty—all in keeping with the rich and varied tints of the verdurous roof above their heads. Then how stately they seem to march between the broad avenues of trees; and how fine is the attitude when, with outstretched neck, one pauses to reach the red cluster of hawthorn berries which just sweeps below the tips of his antlers. But, above all, how beautiful to see them crossing a sheet of water, that spreads out like a mirror in some ancient English park, in which all their forms are reflected.

We now see riding upon the air the light and graceful downs of the dandelion and thistle, gliding noiselessly along, like transparent and winged insects, now alighting for a moment upon the leaves, then floating away high up in the clear air, until they become invisible to the eye. Spanning from branch to branch, we see the light, silken network of the spider bending in the breeze, while the little mechanist sits safely in the centre of his own mazy structure, his airy walls beaded with pearl—for such seem the rounded dew-drops that glitter on the star-like points of the closely intersected wheel on which he rests. We see the bee moving drowsily and listlessly along, like a weary traveller who almost despairs of reaching his next resting-place, so wide apart now lie the road-side flowers—those beautiful half-way houses, which he met at every step as he went singing merrily on his way through the land of Summer. Hope, who looked with a cheerful countenance upon the landscape of Spring, has departed; instead of watching each green and flowery object day by day as they budded and blossomed, we now see only the traces of slow and sure decay, the green fading bit by bit, until the leaves become like the skeleton wings of an insect, the wind blowing through those places which were before marked with azure, and crimson, and gold. The Sun himself seems growing older; he rises later from his bed in the morning, and returns to rest earlier in the evening, and appears not to have that strength which he possessed when he rose in the youthful vigour of Spring, and the bright and cheerful manhood of Summer;

for his golden eyes seem clouded, and his breath thick and heavy, as he struggles through the surrounding fog. All these marks of the seasons tell us that the year is growing grey, and slowly tottering towards the grave of Winter.

But the hand of Autumn has at present a slight hold upon the feeble pulse of Summer, who seems loth to depart while there is still so much green hanging about the woods, and so much blue and sunshine about the sky and earth, though the leaves are rustling in the forest paths, and the harvest-fields will soon be silent, while the heavy fruit that bows down the branches proclaim that her labour is ended—that Golden Autumn has come to gather in and garner the rich treasures she has left behind.

Beautiful are the old English orchards during this season, with their gnarled and twisted branches and moss-covered stems, standing upon a thick carpet of grass that looks green all the year long—a verdant sward, spread purposely for the fruit to fall upon, when they have drunk in their fill of mellowness, and dyed their cheeks with the rosy hues of the sunshine. Pleasant is it to look upon these fine old deformed trees, whose shoulders are round and backs bent through the heavy loads which they have borne year after year, and who still seem to glory in their hale and hearty old age, and to boast of the weighty burthens which have sunk their grey old heads, yet still left such sunny streaks behind. What forgotten feasts have they supplied! What old-fashioned, heavy, oaken tables have they helped to furnish, sending forth, a century ago, high-piled dishes of rich, ruddy, and golden-rinded fruit to the happy guests, who now lie in the village churchyard, opposite the moss-covered orchard wall—yet so near, that Spring sometimes blows her blossoms upon their graves—perhaps on the narrow bed of the "grey forefather" who first planted that hoary stem. What sweet faces have looked up from beneath those aged boughs! What merry voices have sounded within that ancient enclosure! The gladsome shout of childhood—the silvery laugh of the modest maiden—the deep-chested chorus of the bluff old farmer—all met to gather into the dry and wide store-rooms the weighty

fruit that ever came of its own accord, and neither asked for man's attendance or labour.

We must not pass over the beauty of sea-side scenery at this season of the year, for we are children of the ocean; and, next to our matchless English landscapes, do we love the rocks that guard, and the waves that are ever washing around our lovely island. Pleasant is it now to stand upon some tall headland, and watch the ever-moving waves, as they roll through the shifting shadows of the clouds, purple, and green, and golden, onward and onward, until they are lost among the indistinct haziness of the distant sky. Then how solemnly falls upon the ear that never-ceasing murmur of the waves—that voice which for countless ages has never been silent, but day and night, for evermore, beats time with its melancholy music upon the pebbly beach. Or to walk under the tall white cliffs, which have stood for undated centuries, when that wide sea was mastless, and neither the shadow of man nor ship had ever been mirrored upon its waves; for even then they stood, as they do now, reflecting back the bright autumnal sunshine. Like things of life, the tiny fishing-boats mount above the waves, diminishing in the distance until they appear mere specks—until you can only just discern the spots of light which indicate the white sails, and you can almost fancy that they are "birds of calm brooding on the charmed wave." What great golden pathways seem at times to stretch over the deep—reaching to the very verge of the sky—smooth to appearance, yet, when trodden, rough and perilous, as that which the pilgrim traverses on his way to the shrine of his saint—on his journey towards heaven. Who can imagine those terrible convulsions which severed England from the opposite coast of France; that stormy hour, when the sea rushed in between—when the mammoth and the mastodon stood moaning upon the severed cliffs, and no human eye beheld that mighty crash? Who that gazes upon the sea can for one moment doubt that such changes have taken place?

The gentle refreshing breezes by day, and the delicious calms by night, draw a vast concourse of persons to the sea-side at this season, nor is there any period of the year when it is more

agreeable. Sailing, and other marine recreations, are at no time better suited to beguile the hours than in the warm bright days of Autumn, and the peculiar stillness of a sea-side evening scene by moonlight is now to be enjoyed in perfection. The beauty

of a sea-scene, and the hushed poetry of night, are thus woven into undying words by Byron :—

> "The moon is up, and yet it is not night—
> Sunset divides the sky with her—a sea
> Of glory streams along the Alpine height
> Of blue Friuli's mountains ; Heaven is free

From clouds, but of all colours seems to be,
Melted to one vast Iris of the West,
Where the Day joins the past Eternity;
While, on the other hand, meek Dian's crest
Floats through the azure air—an island of the blest!

"A single star is at her side, and reigns
With her o'er half the lovely heaven; but still
Yon sunny sea heaves brightly, and remains
Roll'd o'er the peak of the far Rhætian hill,
As Day and Night contending were, until
Nature reclaim'd her order:—gentle flows
The deep-dyed Brenta, where their hues instil
The odorous purple of a new-born rose,
Which streams upon her stream, and glass'd within its glows.

"Fill'd with the face of heaven, which, from afar,
Comes down upon its waters; all its hues,
From the rich sunset to the rising star,
Their magical variety diffuse:
And now they change; a paler shadow strews
Its mantle o'er the mountains; parting day
Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues
With a new colour as it gasps away,
The last still loveliest, till—'t is gone—and all is gray."

"It is a grand sight," says the "British Naturalist," "to behold the sun rise on an Autumn morning from a mountain-top. Early though it be, there is a sentinel upon the heath which spreads at our feet; a shrill whistle comes sharp and clear upon the morning breeze, which awakens all the echoes. The eagle and the raven are yet on the rocks, and reynard is just leaving his earth in the coppice below. That whistle is his reveille, to warn those birds that nestle among the grass in the heath that some enemy is coming abroad. It is the note of the plover.

"The place to be chosen for a view of sunrise on an Autumn morning is some elevation near the sea-coast—the eastern coast, where, from the height of a thousand feet, one can look down upon the chequered beauty of the land and the wide expanse of the ocean; where the morning fog is found white and fleecy in the valleys along the courses of the streams, and the more elevated trees, and castles, and houses show like islands floating in the watery waste; when the uplands are clear and well-defined, and

the beam yet gilds the higher peaks, while the streak upon the sea is of that soft purple which is really no colour and every colour at the same time. The whole landscape is so soft, so undefined, and so shadowy, that one is left to fill up the outline by conjecture; and it seems to get more indefinite still as the sun comes nearer the horizon. The dews feel the coming radiance, and ascend by anticipation. At length there is one streaming pencilling of golden light, which glitters and breaks as if it were the momentary lightning of a cloud; the dew-drops at your feet are rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and opals, for an instant, and then it is gone. If the horizon be perfectly clear, this 'blink' of the rising sun has a very curious effect. It comes momentarily, and when it is gone, all seems darker than before. But the darkness is of as brief duration as the light, and the rising grounds are soon brought out with a grouping of light and shade that never can be observed when the sun is at any height, as the shadow is from eminence to eminence, filling all the hollows; and though deep, it is remarkably transparent, as evaporation has not yet begun to give its fluttering indistinctness to the outlines of objects. By the time that half of the solar disk is above the horizon, the sea is peculiarly fine, and it is better if the view be down an estuary. In the distant offing it is one level sheet, more brilliant than burnished gold, in which the boats, with their dark sails, as they return from the deep-sea fishing, project their streaking shadows for miles, though each seems but a speck. The lands on the opposite side of the estuary pay their morning salutations, in soft breezes wafted across, as the sun touches a point of the one here, and of the other there; for the sun no sooner beams out upon one part of the landscape than the little breezes from all the others hasten thither to worship, so instantly does the warm sun put the atmosphere in motion, and as those breezes come from more moist places there is still dew upon the summits at sunrise. Those cross winds, rippling the water this way and that, give an opal play to the whole; while behind you, if the estuary stretches that way, it passes into a deep blue, as from the small angle at which the rays fall they are all reflected forward; and the very

same cause that makes the water so brilliant before you, gives it that deep tint in the rear. By and by the trees and buildings in lateral position come out with a line of golden light on their eastern sides; while to the west, every pane in the windows beams and blazes like a beacon-fire. The fogs, too, melt away, except a few trailing fleeces, over the streams and lakes, that lie sheltered beneath steep or wooded banks; and they soon fade from these also, and the mingled fields, and woods, and streams are all arrayed in green and gold. The cottage smoke begins to twine upward in pale blue volumes; the sheep are unfolded; the laden wains pass along the roads, and labour in the field begins."

This is a beautifully painted picture, and one that can only be seen at the close of Summer or the commencement of Autumn; and we trust this exquisite extract will draw attention to the work from which it is taken, and which is too little known.

HARVEST TIME.

CORN-HARVEST—RUTH AND BOAZ—REAPERS AND GLEANERS — HARVEST-HOME—HERRICK'S "HOCK-CART"—SHAKESPEARE'S DESCRIPTION OF AN OLD ENGLISH MERRY-MAKING.

NOW all along our sunny shores, and in the very heart of our sea-engirded island, there is a busy stir of gathering in the Harvest, for the golden corn is ripe and ready for the sickle; and man and maiden—when the wheat is very forward—must set aside all other labour to swell the corn-reaping band. To the farmer it is the busiest and most important time of all the year, if he is a great wheat grower; nor do the poorest

villagers feel less interested, for gleaning is also their harvest time, and a bushel or two of corn may now be picked up, to make bread of in Winter. I love to see children and women gleaning! "The little wee things," with their hard red legs shining amongst the stubble, and stooping now and then to pick up an ear of corn, or raising their little heads to scare away a crow, or standing with their scissors to clip off the long straw, and thrust only the ears into the bags which their mothers have tied before them. Then to see them running to the kind old woman, and, showing the apparently well-filled bag, tell her that it is dinner-time! But, alas for the children! she puts in her hand, and cramming down the wheat, and thrusting it well into the corners, and throwing out much unnecessary straw, sends them away with it, less in appearance, but promising them their dinners when it is really well filled. Then the tales that are told while they partake of their humble meals, by the piled sheaves, or under the shadow of the high hedge! Then to think of Ruth gleaning in the field of her kinsman Boaz! O how I love gleaning for Ruth's sake, for the sake of poetry and of antiquity!—for there were gleaners ages long ago.

Who were Naomi and Ruth? Perchance they lived together in some lovely cottage, where the palm-trees waved before their door, and often sat contentedly by its porch, that overlooked the sunny cornfields which lay around Bethlehem, conversing about their husbands until the sun sank down, and the blue twilight settled like gentle sleep upon the surrounding scenery. It might be near some cornfield in Moab where Naomi urged the fair Ruth to leave her alone to her sorrow and return to her own home. But although Orpah went away and left her weeping mother, Ruth would not go, but supported Naomi, and walked with her down the hill-side. It was harvest then, and the voices of the daughters of Judah were heard singing in the valleys. O how I love gleaners for the sake of Ruth! A sad night would they pass in their empty home at Bethlehem, for all the people seemed against Naomi, and some of them taunted her with her poverty—they no doubt sneered also at the lovely Moabitish woman; but Ruth heeded not that; for she arose the next

morning, perhaps with a heavy heart, and went to glean in the field of her kinsman Boaz, who stood overlooking the reapers,

and inquiring kindly who she was, bade her not to leave his field, but glean close by his maidens. They might be beautiful and

kind-hearted Jewish damsels who were reaping before Ruth: doubtless they would whisper one to another, and wonder who the fair stranger was, and why she looked so sad; and then perhaps they would speak gentle words to her, and let fall a few ears of corn, in order that she might gather them; and young Ruth might tell them how her husband had died in the country of Moab, and how she had accompanied her mother-in-law to Bethlehem,—for but few, if they are even very sad, glean in silence: the harvest-field is the place where they make known their sorrows,—the reapers and gleaners confess and are confessors. How light would Ruth's heart beat when she received an invitation from Boaz to come at meal-time and sit beside the reapers, and he handed food to her, and gave her drink!—perhaps the fair Ruth might have had nothing to bring with her from home, and, instead of being light-hearted, might sigh to share her parched corn with Naomi. Who could help loving her, when she had left her home and her country to share the privations and sorrows of Naomi? What a colour must have overspread her cheeks when Boaz told her of these things, and praised the poor gleaner!

And Boaz commanded his young men to let her glean even among the sheaves, and to let fall some handfuls on purpose for her, that she might gather them up: so she gleaned on until evening, until the bright round harvest-moon heaved up, and threw its silver splendour over the high-piled sheaves. Poor Ruth! she gleaned on; and as she stooped to tie up her gleanings in a bundle, that she might carry them the better on her head to Bethlehem, no doubt a tear fell upon the corn, and she thought of her home on the plains of Moab—thought of the river Jordan she had passed, that flowed murmuringly along, and kissed the walls of Jericho with sweet ripples, and perhaps bathed the stems of the palm-trees which grew by the home of her childhood.

"Sick for home, she stood in tears amid the alien corn."

She thought of Naomi and her lonely dwelling, and how anxiously she would stand listening for the sound of her returning footsteps. Perhaps Naomi had had no food since Ruth left

her at sunrise; and oh, how gladly would her heart beat when she saw Ruth's lovely form darkening her threshold with her shadow, and heard the rustling of the long barley which she brought, and listened in the twilight, or perhaps in the light of the broad yellow harvest-moon, to Ruth's sweet voice, while repeating all the kind words which Boaz had said, and telling of his kindlier actions, as she gave to Naomi a portion of the food which she had saved from what Boaz had helped her to so plentifully! And Ruth continued to go out with his maidens, and gleaned through the whole barley-harvest unto the end of wheat-harvest, still living with Naomi, whom she loved tenderly. Time glided along, and Boaz loved Ruth, and the poor stranger who went out to glean in his fields became his wife. And Ruth's poverty compelled her to sell the land which was her inheritance; and Boaz purchased it, and with it the freedom of Ruth. Perchance after this she often walked forth into the fields on the evenings of Autumn, and gazed on those very places where she had been a gleaner, and could then call them her own. Nay, she might have led David the poet, and future King of Israel, by the hand, when he was but a boy, and have told him all she had gone through; and perchance on a future day he sang the sorrows of Ruth, and they long lived in tradition, and were chanted by other gleaners in the valleys of Bethlehem, nor have they, after long ages glided away, ever been forgotten.

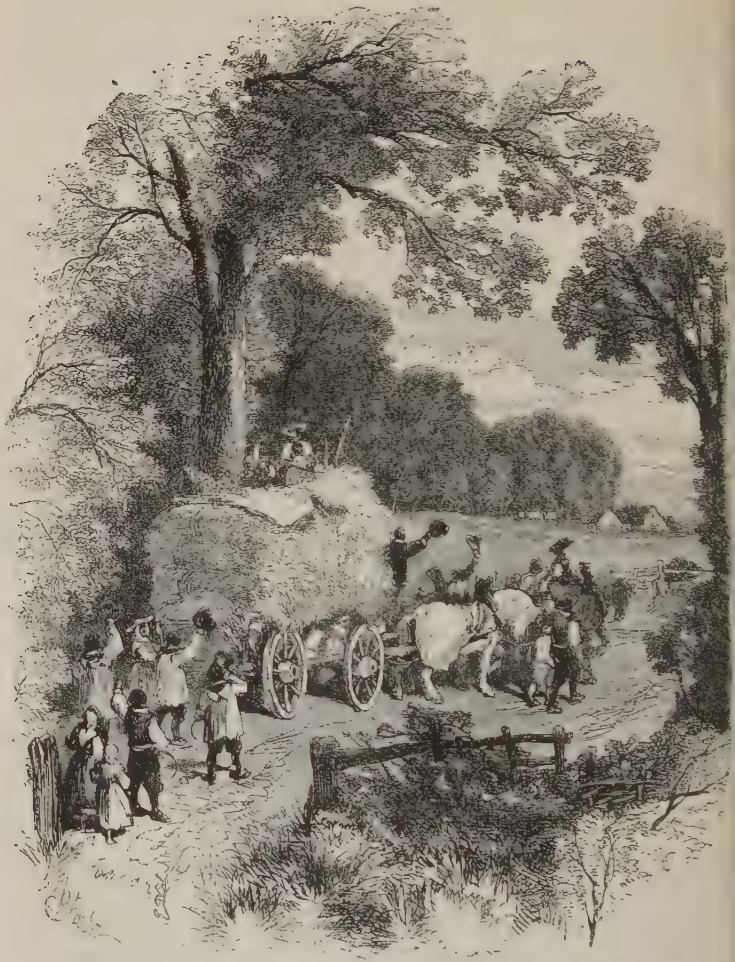
Neither harvest-supper nor sheep-shearing feast present such poetical features as the rural employments which terminate in their celebration, for both in the end are but reduced to the common and necessary acts of eating and drinking. In harvest time we see an old and beautiful picture; it was the same thousands of years ago; it is familiar to us in the pages of Holy Writ. Abraham and the early patriarchs have looked upon such scenes, for it has ever been a time of rejoicing. What rich pictures, mellowed with the sunsets of ages, rise before the eye as we look upon the sun-browned reapers! scenes not there presented, but such as have sprung from the events caused by good or bad harvests. We see, in Egypt, Joseph and his brethren; Abraham and Isaac overlooking the harvest-field from their

tents; lands sold for measures of corn; David's household busy in the fields; our Saviour gathering the ears of wheat on the Sabbath; and a hundred other incidents which are connected with the sacred history of our religion.

But beautiful as may have been the harvest-fields of Palestine or Egypt, they could never have excelled in picturesque effect those which we have seen in our own England, hemmed in every way by rich and park-like scenery. Here vast breezy uplands, that come sweeping down into broad pasture-lands, all waving golden with eary corn. Reapers and gleaners—men, women, and children—clothed in every variety of homely costume, standing, stooping, or sitting down beside the piled-up sheaves, or half-buried in some little hollow behind the standing corn. Nor are the actions of the reapers to be passed over unnoticed, for there is a peculiar art in making those straw bands in which the sheaves are bound, in twisting the heads of corn together so as not to shake out the grain, in placing them nicely upon the stubble, and, finally, in tying up the sheaf itself, and securing the stubble ends of the band, and giving to them all, when bound, a free and plumpy appearance. We see there such scenes as bring before the eye Keats' splendid description of Autumn, where he says:—

> "Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
> Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
> Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
> Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
> Drowsed with the fume of poppies; while thy hook
> Spares the next swathe, and all its twinèd flowers;
> And sometimes, like a gleaner, thou dost keep
> Steady thy laden head across a brook."

Now, while walking up some green lane that straggles along between rows of fields and copses, your ear may be arrested by a distant sound, a mingled hum of voices pealing forth in glad shouts and loud huzzas the "Hip, hip, hip" of "harvest-home." Supposing you to have gained some rural stile, over which you climb, and by a slow and easy ascent reach the summit of a range of high fields or sloping hills—or, more properly, an upland scene; you look down in the distance, and see a laden



wagon moving slowly along, with its last load of wheat. The harvest-field still shines like gold ; for, although the sheaves are piled upon the heavy wain, the stubble has, in the distance, the appearance of a dwarfed cornfield. Groups of gleaners also dot

the newly-cleared lands,—for there is a rich gathering in those spots where the sheaves were piled to dry: but they are not gleaning now, for the last "stouk" is still standing in the field, the topmost sheaf of which is buried beneath bunches of rich-coloured ribbons and flowers; long streams of blue, and yellow, and crimson have been floating out from the top of that "shock" ever since morning, and now the whole row along the furrow has disappeared, excepting that. At last the waggon approaches it, the gleaners and reapers rend the air with their loud huzzas, as the "harvest-sheaf," the crown of the field, is held high on the long pitching-fork by the labourer; it is then received by the man on the top of the load, and reared on end, the most conspicuous object, through its gaudy colours, in the whole landscape. On the waggon is seated a beautiful girl,—her straw-bonnet is decorated with a wreath of flowers: the horses, too, wear the same ornaments; each one is led by a youth, who is embrowned with summer toil. There are others mounted on the corn-sheaves, huzzaing to the highest pitch of their voices, while one holds a few of the finest ears that have been gathered upon the point of his pitching-fork: these will also be decorated with ribbons in the evening, and suspended either from the ceiling of the room, or from a branch of the tree under which they keep their harvest-feast. There are boys in almost every tree by which the wain passes, looking down upon the last load, and shouting with all their might—then descending, and joining the train before or behind, and keeping up the cheerful sound of "Harvest-home." Now they near the large good-looking farm-house; see, the old farmer is at the gate, with a foaming tankard in his hand! His wife, too, is beside him, and his handsome daughter —hark, how her clear voice rings! There is a youth, too, near her—it is the young squire; he has also come to share in the merriment of "Harvest-home." But, listen! for they have halted beside the gate which opens on the front of the house, and are singing a stave nearly as old as the hills.

"Summer's toiling now is past;
Harvest now hath sent her last—
Her last, last load.

If the field containeth more,
Master, give it to the poor!
Abroad—abroad,
Let them through the corn-field roam,
While we welcome harvest-home—
Harvest-home, harvest-home,
While we welcome harvest-home:
Songs shall sound and ale-cups foam
While we welcome harvest-home."

And see! others have emerged from the stack-yard, in their clean white frocks, their faces ruddy with toil and health; and now they take their seats under the old oak-tree, where a substantial dinner is smoking. At each end of the table are seats covered with green branches—those are for the lord and lady of the harvest. But even the peasants are courteous, and have resigned them to the young squire and the farmer's daughter, who they expect will one day be their master and mistress. And now the old man is carving the large sirloin, and the good wife is busied in attending to their wants: neither of them will eat a mouthful until the others are supplied. What platefuls they devour! Look at those enormous plum-puddings, that seem loads for an Atlas! What inroads have they made on the thick rotundity of a world of sweets! and how happy they all appear! Saw ye that good-looking youth drink to the lovely maiden opposite? They have reaped side by side all the Autumn, and lingered in the field longer of an evening than the rest; and he always bound up her sheaves, and cut wider into the lands than fell to the share of his sickle; and when any thistles or thorns had pierced her fingers, he extracted them—oh how carefully! They sat down on the same sheaf to eat their meals; and she had always a few sweet apples in her basket, and he had always a store of honest manly words; and they have talked about marriage to each other,—nay, he has even told her how much money he has saved in service, enough to furnish a little cottage. See, the old farmer has observed them, and he whispers to an old man who has seen sixty harvest-homes, and says, "John, when shall we welcome Harriet home?"—and now the whole table is in a roar—for they are all in good humour, and willing to receive

anything as wit; and John, in reply, says, "Oh, sir, she'll not be the last load, I can see," and he glances at the young couple as he speaks. Then they laugh louder than ever, and some of them look at a fiery-headed fat dairymaid who has long been a load; but Harriet only blushes, and looks down, and moves her feet to and fro, and thinks about her lover, and feels proud of him, and forgets all about harvest-home. But we must leave them now, and listen to Herrick, who wrote the famous song of "Cherry-ripe" above two hundred years ago, and from whose poems we quote a portion of the

"HOCK-CART, OR HARVEST-HOME."

"Come, sons of summer, by whose toil
We are the lords of wine and oil;
By whose tough labours, and rough hands,
We rip up first, then reap our lands!
Crown'd with the ears of corn, now come,
And to the pipe sing 'Harvest-home.'
Come forth, my lord, and see the cart
Drest up with all the country art.
See, here a manikin, there's a sheet
As spotless pure as it is sweet;
The horses, mares, and frisking fillies,
Clad all in linen white as lilies.
The harvest swains and wenches bound
For joy, to see the hock-cart crown'd.
About the cart hear how the rout
Of rural younglings raise the shout,
Pressing before, some coming after,
Those with a shout, and these with laughter.
Some bless the cart, some kiss the sheaves,
Some prank them up with oaken leaves;
Some cross the thill-horse,* some with great
Devotion stroke the home-borne wheat;
While other rustics, less attent
To prayers than to merriment,
Run after, with their garments rent.
Well on, brave boys! to your lord's hearth
Glittering with fire; where, for your mirth,
Ye shall see first the large and chief
Foundation of your feast—fat beef,
With upper stories—mutton, veal,
And bacon,—which makes full the meal;
With several dishes standing by,—

* Shaft-horse.

As here a custard, there a pie,
And here all-tempting frumenty.
And for to make the merry cheer,
If smirking wine be wanting here,
There's that which drowns all care, stout beer;
Which freely drink to your lord's health,
Then to the plough, the commonwealth;
Next to your flails, your fanes, your vats;
Then to the maids with wheaten hats.
To the rough sickle, and crook'd scythe,
Drink, frolic boys, till all be blythe.
Feed and grow fat; and as ye eat,
Be mindful that the labouring neat,
As you, may have their full of meat;
And know besides, ye must revoke
The patient ox unto the yoke,
And all go back unto the plough
And harrow, though they're hang'd up now.
And you must know your lord's words true—
Feed him ye must whose food fills you;
And that this pleasure is like rain,
Not sent ye for to drown your pain,
But for to make it spring again."

Stevenson, in his works published in 1661, alluding to the "all-tempting frumenty" mentioned by Herrick, says: "The frumenty pot welcomes home the harvest-cart, and the garland of flowers crowns the captain of the reapers. The battle of the field is now stoutly fought. The pipe and the tabor are now busily set at work, and the lad and the lass will have no lead on their heels. Oh! 'tis a merry time wherein honest neighbours make good cheer, and God is glorified in his blessings on the earth."

I love these old rural merry-makings for Shakespeare's sake, and his Perdita,

"Who was the prettiest low-born lass
That ever ran on the greensward,"

and whom he makes "queen of the feast" in his "Winter's Tale." Shakespeare tells us what good things the clown was sent for to provide for the feast, and these are his own words:—"Three pound of sugar; five pound of currants; rice! What will (Perdita) do with rice? But my father hath made her mistress of

the feast, and she lays it on. She hath made four-and-twenty nosegays for the shearers; three-man song-men all (they sang songs in parts), and very good ones. I must have saffron, to colour the warden-pies; mace, dates, none—that's out of my note; nutmegs, seven; a race or two of ginger—but that I may beg; four pounds of prunes, and as many of raisins o' the sun."

Shakespeare himself, when only a Warwickshire lad, had no doubt often partaken of these good things at the farm-houses in the neighbourhood of Stratford, and well knew the purposes they were applied to, at sheep-shearing feasts and harvest-home merry-makings. And some old farmer's wife, whom he well

knew, must have sat for the following portrait, which was drawn by his own master-hand, and as a word-painting from the life has never been excelled :—

> "When my old wife lived, upon
> This day she was both pantler, butler, cook,—
> Both dame and servant; welcomed all, served all;
> Would sing her song, and dance her turn; now here,
> At the upper end o' the table; now i' the middle;
> On his shoulder, and his; her face o' fire
> With labour; and the thing she took to quench it,
> She would to each one sip."—*Winter's Tale.*

I have in a former work pointed out the master-touches in this character.* What life! what stir! what happiness! what a hearty welcome does she give her guests! We see her moving about, "now here at the upper end of the table, now in the middle; on his shoulder, then on his." We hear her talking—"Why, neighbour, you eat nothing; do try this ham: that beef lay in corn for a fortnight; I cured it myself. And how does my god-daughter, Margery? Why did you not bring her? And so poor neighbour Hathaway is no better? Well-a-day! last harvest-feast we danced 'Green Sleeves' together. That pie is overmuch baked; try the cheesecake. Neighbour, I drink to thee. But I must go peep at the fowls left roasting. Just a small glass to cool me; a welcome to you all." Then she is lost for a few moments, for she was cook, butler, dame, and servant. No doubt she was well known about Stratford, and that, on a future day, when the Warwickshire lad's works were printed, some old man, as he stumbled upon the passage, would exclaim, "Why that was old dame So-and-so; I knew her well: her daughter was Billy's sweeting when he was a boy. Hey, he's right.

> 'She was the prettiest low-born lass
> That ever ran on the green sward.'

I've seen her dance with Master William, as we used to call him, many a time." For we can scarcely think otherwise than that Perdita was some beautiful rustic maiden, or, it might be, one of the proud daughters from the hall, who had for once descended from her dignity to play the "queen of the feast:"

* Pictures of Country Life.

for we have seen such condescension in our day at a pastoral May-day game. It might be that her image became clothed in after years with the matured richness and immortal poetry which he has thrown around her; and from her he shadowed forth a form too pure and too ethereal to belong to earth, and threw around the memory of his youth a divinity that belongs to heaven.

Although the scene of the "Winter's Tale" is laid in Bohemia, yet nearly every line descriptive of the feast carries us to the Avon—to his native home, and the characters he had mingled with in his boyish days—and is as thoroughly English as Herrick's "Hock-Cart," but enriched with many a little homely touch which the eye of Herrick never took in.

Every one at all conversant with history has read the sufferings and privations which whole nations have endured in times of scarcity, and can well understand why in the olden time there was so much rejoicing over a plentiful harvest. The richest crop ever hangs upon a "slender thread;" the finest fields of corn that ever bowed in the breeze or glittered in the summer sunlight, a few days' rain may blacken and destroy, and render unfit for food. Man cannot protect his crop against the elements, until it is garnered. Although the broad seas are now open, and ships from every quarter of the globe may pour foreign grain into every store-house in England, yet we shall be sorry to see the day when she puts her chief trust in such supplies. She is not yet prepared to turn her rich corn-fields into grounds for factories, nor to trust to other nations for her supplies of corn. England, from the very richness of its soil and beauty of its scenery, was ordained to be an agricultural country; and, however far its great cities may in time extend, it must be the work of ages to blot out the farms, and homesteads, and green rural scenes, which are still its greatest charms.

Our merchants and manufacturers struggle on for years in close rooms and crowded offices, in the hope of at last retiring into some little village with its orchard, garden, and green field, and there to end their days in peace and tranquillity. Such a wish has ever been foremost in the bosoms of our great poets,

statesmen, and philosophers. It is a distinguishing feature in the character of an Englishman ; and perhaps in no other nation in the world is there such a thirst for this green retirement and domestic peace. But this we have already dwelt upon more fully at the commencement of our work, and only repeat it again to say, that we hope and trust it will never be otherwise.

WOODS IN AUTUMN.

WOODS—NUTTING—SQUIRREL-HUNTING—BLACKBERRYING—A WILD WOODLAND SCENE—PHEASANTS—PARTRIDGES—CHANGING COLOURS OF AUTUMN—FOX-HUNTING—EARTH-STOPPER—AUTUMNAL SOUNDS.

EVERYWHERE we now see a change in the aspect of Nature, but more especially is this alteration visible in the fading colours and falling foliage of the trees; for Autumn, with ruthless hand, is tearing down the green curtains of Summer. All the beautiful arras that was woven in her looms, since first Spring came and pointed out the spots where the little buds were to be placed, and sent April with her gentle showers to open them,

Autumn is scattering on the winds, to be blown into the mire and trampled upon.

But amid all this ruin, Autumn has revealed many little morsels of beautiful landscape which have long been shut out,—patches of green fields, and stretches of winding roads, the white-washed front of a distant cottage, or the grey spire of some remote village church, which all Summer long have been hidden behind the trees. Between the openings of the naked boughs we see where the vales dip down, and the hills rise up. We see many beauties in the form of the surrounding landscape which have long been concealed. We observe the forms of the evergreens which have been dwarfed by their taller brethren of the grove; we see numberless nests in the hedges and bushes which we have frequently looked into during the Summer without being able to discover anything more than the dark masses of leaves. We observe a beauty in the grouping and falling of the berries and wild fruits which hang upon the branches, and marvel that their elegant forms have never before arrested the glance; and, above all, the eye is attracted by the number of strange birds which are slowly coming over to winter with us. We discover that a flock of sheep in a green turnip-field, with the distant hayrick, the thatched shed, the picturesque fence, and the pond of water which the naked trees overhang, would, if well painted, form a pretty foreground in a picture of Autumn. The few hard winter apples that are still left upon the trees, though only a few weeks ago they seemed to set the teeth on edge by looking at them, have now rather a tempting look; and we perceive that the dark purple berries of the ivy are in keeping with the sombre green of the closely-matted leaves, and the beautiful colours of the fungi that still remain now attract our attention. We see many a rich tint in the falling acorns, and trace in the surrounding mosses forms and colours as beautiful and delicate as may be found in the choicest flowers; and sometimes, when the weather is mild, we discover flowers that are again blowing, although they have none of the fragrance of Spring. And in such spots

> "the bramble bends
> Beneath its jetty load; the hazel hangs

With auburn bunches, dipping in the stream
That sweeps along, and threatens to o'erflow
The leaf-strewn banks,"

from which the piping winds are ever sweeping thousands of the "pale and hectic leaves" into the torrent. Naked and leafless as the woods now nearly are, there is something grand about the great Autumn wind, uplifting its mighty voice, and pealing like an organ through these ancient cathedrals of Nature—these huge temples which God's own hand erected. Who can walk beneath those wide-spread avenues—that vaulted and trellised roof—those gigantic pillars, which the hand of man reared not—the silent workmanship of thousands of Summer nights, without feeling that they are in the presence of Him by whom all things were created? Who can look upon the mountains and hills, the workmanship of His hands, then glance at the little piles which the builder Man erected, without acknowledging how feeble is the human arm compared to the Power that reared those stupendous monuments? Nature is ever beautiful. Even now the reeds are rocked, and wave their plumy heads beside the wooded brook, and we see a grace in their form and motion which was lost when the leaves of Summer threw their shadows over the scene. The tall bulrush, that feathered chieftain of lake and mere, now dances his sable plume upon the wind, and proudly overlooks the vassal-like reeds which rustle about his feet. The fallen leaf sails upon the current, like a fairy bark sporting with every whirling eddy it meets with by the way—then darting along again with eager speed, as if to make up for the time it had lost. What a babbling the brook here makes, seeming to hold parley with the pebbles which have checked its course, then muttering to itself as it rolls along to where the stem of the mighty tree, which the wind hath torn up by the roots, lies prostrate and athwart its channel, and there it chafes and churns, and vents its wrath in maddening foam, and endeavours in vain to overleap the bulky barrier. What a desolate air hangs around the ruins of that old wooden bridge, which years ago has been impassable; what piles of moss and weeds have gathered around the dark and slimy planks, some of which rock and sway beneath

the force of the torrent, and, though shorn of their strength, still defy its power; for—

> The piles that they stand on are green with decay,
> And half buried with weeds that to and fro sway
> In the eddy and foam, both by night and by day.

I love to hear this mighty roar in the old woods at Autumn, when the trees seem to gather up their giant boughs and to give back blow for blow, while they sacrifice every leaf in the combat. There is something grand in this invisible enemy the wind, which you hear and feel, but see not—something spirit-stirring in the struggle that is carried on around you, and in the crash of the huge branches as they are torn off by this unseen adversary.

Many and pleasant are my recollections of Autumn, for it was the long-looked-for month in which we annually sallied forth a-nutting. How the wild lanes rang with laughter, as we sauntered through them, as merry a group of lads and lasses as ever bore a bottle of berry-brown ale! Over many a pleasant meadow did we wander before we reached the old wood, until at length it rose before us, as green and silent as though all its hoary trees slumbered. Then we had to find an entrance; and there was the deep dyke to cross, over which reeds and rushes hung; and the tangling fence to scale, armed with thorns and ragged brambles. At length a gap was discovered; and then we had to hand our fair companions across the ditch, who screamed at fears of their own creating, while a watching briar caught hold of their passing drapery and claimed a portion for toll. On we rambled toward its gloomy centre, threading our way among the entangling underwood, and making many a circuit to avoid some impenetrable thicket,—now stooping, or almost creeping, to pass under the low branches,—anon tearing our garments with the brambles, or hunting for a lost shoe amid the furze. At last we reached an open glade where the full sun streamed upon the untrodden grass: this we claimed as our resting-place, and having drunk a foaming bumper, we placed our provisions at the foot of some stately elm, and each wandered where fancy led.

It was the pleasantest of all our gipsy feasts, for it was held in

the centre of the wild woods, in one of Nature's own summer-houses, in a bower, not by art,

"But by the trees' own inclination made;"

a spot which, even to reach, we had to pass through one of Earth's Paradises; for never did more beautiful hills rise up above a pastoral country than those we ascended on our way to the woods. No grim board ever disgraced those ancient oaks, warning the lover of nature not to trespass; for, excepting the underwood and the wild fruits, there was nothing we could have carried off there, for the bole of the smallest tree would have been a load for half a dozen horses. Game we meddled not with, and this the old Squire well knew; we trampled nothing down but the entangling thicket, bramble, and sloe, and hazel, and wild rose, which generally took toll of our drapery as we

passed, giving a scratch for a pressure and a rent for a tug, which only increased our merriment the more. There was ever some lady's shawl to disentangle; some heavy and well-filled basket to extricate from the bushes; a long rent to pin up; a trailing briar to cut away, before we could pass farther; a brook to leap, and a circle to take, which sometimes only led to more impenetrable shades; a stray companion to hunt up, whose "whereabout" was only known from the direction in which the voice came, for these petty perils were the very charms of Nutting. What stooping, and creeping, and pulling, and dragging, was there, where neither gig nor chaise could move a foot unless the wild underwood and weeds had been cleared. Then what a beautiful glade we at last came to; one which the foot of man had seldom passed; which the richest carpet that was ever spread out never exceeded in softness—the very turf was elastic; it had been formed by the fallen leaves of many centuries. And the oak that stood in the centre! You marvelled how a single stem could bear such majestic branches; for Architecture, with all the skill and means of art, could never invent a pillar to support such a projecting weight as that which sprang from the bole of a single tree. As we wish to make all true worshippers of Nature acquainted with Browne's "Brittania's Pastorals," we shall again present them with another rural picture. The scene, this time, is "Nutting:"—

"A wandering boy sets out to gather nuts,
A hoöked pole he from a hazel cuts,
Now throws it here, then there, to take some hold,
But bootless and in vain; the rocky mould
Admits no cranny where his hazel hook
Might promise him a step; till, in a nook
Somewhat above his reach, he hath espied
A little oak; and having often tried
To catch a bough with standing on his toe,
Or leaping up, yet not prevailing so,
He rolls a stone towards the little tree,
Then, getting on it, fastens warily
His pole into a bough, and at his drawing,
The early-rising crow with clamorous cawing,
Leaving the green bough, flies about the rock,
Whilst twenty twenty couples to him flock.

And now within his reach the thin leaves wave;
With one hand only then he holds his stave,
And with the other grasping, first the leaves,
A pretty bough he in his hand receives;
Then to his girdle making fast the hook,
His other hand another bough hath took;
His first a third, and that, another gives,
To bring him to the place."

A stone we never remember finding in the old woods we are now writing about, excepting one (probably some ancient landmark) too heavy by far for us to move—nothing but moss and decayed leaves, and open places which in Spring were carpetted with lilies-of-the-valley, anemonies, primroses, and wild hyacinths, the latter only known to us by the unaltered old Saxon name of blue-bells.

And many a sweet Saxon face lighted up the solitude of the greenwood in those days that have departed. Dost thou remember, dear Amy, how we struck up a dark avenue together, and, after a long contest with the impending boughs, at last came upon a lovely clump of hazels where the brown nuts hung in clusters, and the transparency of the slender branches made a green golden light, which streamed through the beautiful foliage, while the mournful ringdove kept cooing at intervals somewhere beyond the gloomy fir-trees? Have you forgotten how far we wandered away from our companions as we were tempted onward by the ripe brown nuts which we gathered so plentifully in that sequestered part of the wood, and how, when we called to our comrades, your shrill sweet voice rang through the distant dells? —and then we listened, but heard nothing save the prolonged echoes dying away in the distance. Many an intricate maze did we thread, where the deep umbrage made an eternal twilight; and, after long search, we found other two, who, like ourselves, were in quest of the open glade. And then we turned to gaze upon the sun, and at last saw a noble beech which we remembered passing, and soon found our companions. And when our repast was spread under the broad tree, we sang our best songs, and told our oldest stories; while one lovely girl sat with her back to her lover, and pouted her rosy lips, and was busied in

tearing a bunch of Autumn flowers to pieces; and when the youth spoke kindly, she threw up her head haughtily and averted her eyes. Cruel youth! he had trifled with her love; had led her away from her companions, she in no wise reluctant, and, while busied in gathering the brown bunches, stolen from her unaware, and, lingering behind a large tree, had heard her call upon his name several times without answering. And when he returned, for he had not been a stone-cast from her, he saw a tear gathering in her large blue eye. Then she accused him of not loving her, or he would never have left her in that lonely place, although her heart told her that he would lay down his life for her safety. But the parting-kiss would be all the sweeter after this love-quarrel, and their affection for each other would be more sincerely felt, while gentler dreams hovered around their slumbers.

Our satchels were well stored with ripe nuts, and we sat in social converse upon the long grass until the sun sloped westward, when we arose and left the wood: but we came out at a part which no one knew, and wandered over many a field until we reached a lonely cottage, and the old man put us in a right path. Wearied and delighted with our excursion, we reached home at twilight, and slept soundly after our pleasant fatigue.

What haunts were these old woods for the Naturalist! Here he might rest concealed for hours, and watch the habits of beasts, birds, and insects—see them feed, build, and burrow—lead forth their young from spray to spray—and note a many things which are now slowly finding their way into books. Such spots called up the England of ancient days, when the skin-clad Briton, with his javelin in his hand and his long hair blown back, pursued the chase through the wooded wilderness, ages before the Roman galleys had ploughed up the sand on our storm-beaten shores. They filled the mind with poetic images, such as seldom float before the eye in walled cities—such as only rise up where Nature still reigns in her primitive grandeur, calling up the old Autumns which reigned over England a thousand years ago.

Squirrel-hunting was another exciting amusement in the

woods in Autumn ; for when the leaves have fallen from the trees, this beautiful and graceful little animal can then be seen leaping merrily from branch to branch, or sitting contentedly on some moss-covered bough, holding the ripe brown nuts in his fore paws, and quite enjoying his woodland repast. What shouting, and hallooing, and tearing of clothes, and losing of shoes, and getting entangled in the briars, is there amongst the boys while hunting him : and no sooner has some little fellow, after much labour, climbed up the tree on which the squirrel is perched, when, just as the adventurer is about to extend his hand, and, as he thinks, seize the prize by the bushy tail, at one leap, and without any apparent effort, away bounds the squirrel to the next tree, which is probably so strong that all the united efforts of the hunters cannot for a moment shake it.

It is only while leaping from branch to branch, when the squirrel sometimes misses his footing and falls upon the ground, that there is any chance of capturing him. Then it is that a dozen hats come off like one, every boy eager to catch, or cover up the little animal ; and many a hat-crown gets crushed amid the scramble in their eager endeavours to seize him. Scarcely any bird forms a more beautiful nest than the squirrel. The moss and leaves, and the fibres of trees, are all neatly interwoven together, and generally placed so artfully at the fork of some branch, as to look more like a knot of the tree itself than a nest. There is scarcely any inhabitant of the wild wood that pays more attention to its young than the squirrel ; for, although they are brought forth about the middle of June, the parents never leave them until the next Spring. The following exquisite description

of squirrel-hunting is so truthful and life-like, that any one who has seen a parcel of noisy boys busily pursuing the little forester, will, while reading it, have the whole scene again as vividly before the eye as when they last witnessed it, although it was written above two hundred years ago, by that most truthful of all rural landscape-painters, William Browne, from whose writings we have before made a few brief extracts :—

"A nimble squirrel from the wood
Ranging the hedges for his filbert food,
Sits partly on a bough, his brown nuts cracking,
And from the shell the sweet white kernel taking :
When with their crooks and bags a host of boys,
To share with him, come with so great a noise,
That he is forced to leave a nut nigh broke,
And for his life leap to a neighbouring oak ;
Thence to a beech, thence to a row of ashes ;
While through the quagmires, and red water plashes,
The boys run, dabbling on through thick and thin ;
One tears his hose, the other breaks his shin ;
This, torn and tattered, hath, with much ado,
Got through the briars—and that hath lost his shoe ;
That drops his band, that headlong falls for haste ;
Another cries behind for being the last ;
With sticks and stones, and many a rounding hollow
The little fool with no small sport they follow ;
Whilst he, from tree to tree, from spray to spray,
Gets to the wood, and hides him in his dray." *

Nor was nutting or squirrel-hunting our only woodland amusements in Autumn, for there were the ripe juicy blackberries to gather, or bramble-berries as the country folk rightly call them.

What wild places did we sometimes stumble upon during these rambles ! Some such we have now in our eyes, which we visited years ago, when we had to make our way through narrow paths, hemmed in with broad fern and prickly gorse bushes, many of which rose high as our heads—for they had never been cut down within the memory of man. And every now and then we came to old hedgerows, covered with golden and silver-coloured moss, and dark through the clouds of sloes and bullaces that grew above, and the huge carved-like ebony blackberries

* Nest.

that hung below. There are few such hedges to be found now; for many and many a year had they grown on, and no one had heeded them. The bramble had spread out before, and the sloe

bushes behind; and the hawthorns and crab-trees had gone on deepening, Summer after Summer, until the hunter was compelled to draw his rein when he approached them; for they had at last formed such an impenetrable barrier, that neither

> "Dint of hoof, nor print of foot,
> Did mark that wild luxurious soil—
> No sign of travel or of toil."

And it was very tantalising to see the largest and ripest blackberries in the very centre of these broad hoary hedges, where we could not get to them without tearing our clothes and scratching our hands and faces.

I have still before the eye of Memory, whenever I turn it thitherward, the landscape of one of those wild scenes, and which I often wandered over in my boyish days. Many a rood of gorse bushes had we to traverse before reaching the border of that wild land of trees. Some of these furze bushes were higher than the head of a tall man on horseback; while upon the edge of the wood grew acres of wild brambles, that had trailed over the low bushes, and formed a hedge so broad that two waggons, could the underwood have borne the weight, might have been driven over them abreast. This wilderness had never been under cultivation within the memory of man. Here grew hawthorns so huge, old, and gray, that they looked as if a dozen stems had been twisted together, and become so hardened, that you might fancy they were bars of iron fused together. Here and there grew giant crab-trees, their gnarled stems covered with moss and long flaky lichens. Even the sun-stained fruit, when mellowed by the mists of Autumn, was sour as vinegar. Some of the trunks were hollow and decayed, and looked like skeletons of extinct monsters, that had lived at an undated period of time, when man was not. Oaks, whose shadows stretched far and wide, and struck the mind with wonder to behold such gigantic arms spread out with no other support than the body from which they sprung; while to pace the length of a single bough seemed like treading a short avenue. Centuries ago had some of these been struck by the thunderbolt, or blackened by the lightning, yet standing like monuments that marked some old

world which had, ages ago, passed away, and left the skeletons of those mighty giants to proclaim the bulk and vastness of that unrecorded era. Around this wilderness of trees there extended a pathless waste of underwood, where hazel and hawthorn, bullace and sloe, were matted and twisted with holly, and bramble, and gorse; while the woodbine climbed high over all, and, like a lady from her turret, looked out upon the wild and silent scene. It was only where the red fox, or the badger, or the daring hunter had forced a passage, that we were able to make our way along this bushy barrier. It recalled those graphic lines of Chaucer's, of a forest,

> "In which there dwelleth neither man nor beast,
> With knotty, knurry, barren trees old,
> Of stubby shape, and hideous to behold."

Above this vast covert of crooked branches, and spiked bushes, and trailing briars, which seemed to have been struggling for ages for the mastery, there hovered scores of birds of prey—hawks of every species, dusky ravens, and horned owls that

stared upon us from out the hollow trees at noon-day, and went sailing across the wild underwood, and between the ancient branches of the trees, like winged ghosts. And ever from the tangled thicket started some wild animal, the huge fox, or the gray badger, the savage wild cat, and the climbing marten; and

we sometimes disturbed the stoat as he fed upon a young hare: or drove the weasel from his banquet, and picked up the ring-dove, warm and bleeding, that he was feeding upon; or saw the fierce eyes of the polecat glaring upon us, as if wondering why we had disturbed his solitary dominions. Great hairy bats went gliding by in the twilight, with their leathern wings outspread; and black water-rats made a hollow sound as they

plunged into the wood brook, and were soon lost in the dark water, or among the black and rotten leaves. Then here and there, in the centre of some grassy and sunny glade, a solitary tree would stand, as if it had been planted there for ornament; and one, an immense oak, the giant of the forest, had seats round it, worm-eaten and decayed: but when, or by whom

placed there, no living soul knew. Not far from this oak was a large solitary stone, which some said was a Druidical altar.

Painters have ever been fond of selecting Autumn for their landscapes, on account of the rich variety then to be found in the varied masses of foliage ; and at no other season of the year can these endless tints be found :

> "The fading many-coloured woods,
> Shade deepening over shade, the country round
> Imbrown : a varied umbrage, dusk and dun,
> Of every hue, from wan declining green
> To sooty dark."

Gilbert White says that one of the first trees that becomes naked is the walnut ; then the ash, if it bears many keys, but if sterile it carries its foliage later into the season. There is a pleasing sound in the rattling of the ash-keys when they are ripe, and something very beautiful in their motion as they are shaken about by the wind.

And often during our woodland rambles in Autumn we startled the lordly pheasant, while feeding or hiding himself in some secluded nook, or perhaps caught sight of him, before he heard

us approach, pacing along a green opening of the wood. A pleasant sight it was to watch him, now erecting his head as if to listen, while a sunbeam fell on his burnished neck, then seeing him stoop to pick up his food, while the long feathers of his gaudy tail swayed in the wind like silken pennons, until, alarmed by the stir we made in the long withered grass, he plunged above the underwood with a loud "whirr," and winged his way to the wide-spread branch of some ivy-covered tree, showing like a mass of crimson and gold in the sunlight that fell around him. Beautiful is it to see a flock of these princely birds feeding upon the wild-wood fruits, in some sequestered opening of the Autumn-kindled woods; for who is there that is not acquainted with his beauty? Look at his eyes, they seem as if they were set in rubies, so richly coloured is the scarlet rim with which they are encircled; while a dark patch of purple feathers relieves them underneath. The head and neck assume such a variety of gaudy hues, when seen in the shifting light, that it is almost impossible to tell where the blue or purple begins, or the rich, ever-varying green ends. Sometimes when we have seen this beautiful bird flying across an open glade, in the sunshine, and as the blaze of light fell upon it, the plumage seemed tinged with every imaginable hue of gold and green, and purple and violet and crimson, barred and flecked and speckled with rich umbery brown and glossy black—far more splendid than the mingled tints of the rainbow. When the king of Lydia was seated on his golden throne, and covered with priceless jewels, he asked the wise Solon if he had ever beheld anything that equalled the splendour with which he was surrounded? "The plumage of the pheasant excels it all," answered the great philosopher.

Yet against this beautiful bird, almost more than any other, is brought the murderous system of battue-shooting. We do believe that many English gentlemen have set their faces against this unfair practice of sporting of late, which is really no better than converting the woods and preserves into a wholesale slaughter-house. The poor birds have no chance of escaping, when a dozen barrels are aimed at them from every direction. It is as cruel a system, in our eye, as the once barbarous custom

of pinning a cock to the ground at Shrove-tide, and shying at it with heavy sticks. If the bird is missed by one, it is sure to be hit by another—like the poor pigeons in the shooting-matches in Battersea-fields, who are waylaid in every direction, and fired at by every Cockney snob that can pull a trigger.

In our eyes it is pitiable to see the havoc the murderous gun makes with their splendid feathers, scattering their gold and crimson and purple plumes upon the wind, and drawing down the bright scarlet rim which encircles their deep-shining eyes, which the filmy darkness covers! The sound of their voices, also, calling on each other from the distant thickets, harmonises well with the silence of the scene. Then to come upon them unawares where they are squatting among the entangled grass and plants, and see them spring up, and with a loud whirr dash through the woven branches to some more secret covert, is a beautiful and striking sight, especially in this month, when every motion of their strong wings scatters a shower of golden leaves on the ground.

There is something very startling to a novice in the flushing of a pheasant the first time he takes aim at it, and there is great odds against his hitting the bird, for its manner of rising is unlike that of any other feathered game—so sudden is the spring, so loud the noise, so unexpected the rattle and rustle of the branches and dead leaves it sweeps through, that we have seen men of iron nerves start aside when the silence of the deep woods has been all at once broken by the unexpected "whirr" of the pheasant. One of our humorous contemporaries has described it as a sudden display of fireworks, which, if such a thing were to be met with suddenly in the gloomy glen of some dark old forest, would, we think, cause the bravest of us to take to our heels, and leave a certain nameless old gentleman to "take the hindmost."

Spaniels broken in for pheasants ought never to be allowed to spring any other game. If they are not broken from questing other game, says Daniel, "they disturb the pheasants, who just fly up and perch upon the lower boughs; and the ground of the covert is in vain traversed and beaten for birds that are already some yards above it." On very wet mornings pheasants frequently

quit the woods, and shelter in the neighbouring fields, annoyed, as some believe, by the continual "drop, dropping" of the rain from the leaves. "A foggy day," says Blaine, "is not unfavourable to pheasant-shooting, and the birds then stray abroad, and rove to considerable distances. Nevertheless, we have always observed that on these days pheasants are doubly alert with their ears; consequently, springing spaniels are not good to quest with. . . . . On the contrary, when a very bright day shines overhead, having tried the morning feeding-grounds, we would advise the gunner to scour the woods well. . . . . The morning's scent, also, when almost evaporated, makes it necessary that yourselves, dogs, and beaters should hunt the closer. Try every part of the cover; pheasants are capricious; but in the forenoon are often found under the bushes and brambles which frequently surround the larger trees of the forest."

Nor is it the pheasant alone against which deadly war is now waged, for the echoes of the wood ring with the shots of the partridge-shooter, as he traverses the stubbly fields, where only a few weeks ago corn-reaping carols were sung. Not, we trust, that all are tempted by the work of destruction alone; for we believe that numbers go with as keen an appetite for the beauties of nature as we ourselves possess. Yet there is something very spirit-stirring in this manly sport—in the attitude of the dog as he throws up his head, and makes a dead stop—in the pleasure with which he sets out to seek the bird after the shot is fired. After all, I prefer seeing the old birds at the head of their young ones, as they half fly and half run, about the close of Summer, hiding themselves among the corn or long grass, until the intruder has passed. I never looked upon the beautiful plumage, so richly diversified with brown, black, and ash-colour, without regret, when I saw these mingled hues dabbled with blood; to me it was ever "a sorry sight."

In partridge-shooting, a sportsman, if at all acquainted with the ground, generally knows where to "prick" for his coveys, having often watched where the birds alight and feed. Once on the spot, if game be pretty plentiful, it will not be long before the dogs are seen stationary, and "mute as marble." The

marker will also have his eye on the scattered covey the moment the trigger is pulled, though sometimes, after alighting, they will run fifty or one hundred yards through the stubble, but this will not mislead you, if your dogs and men understand their

work. Sometimes a covey parts, and if you have two dogs they will each follow a division, and then point their own game; then you

Must make yourself happy with either;

but be sure to decide on one, "while the other dear charmer's away." No true sportsman will follow the same birds many times in one day, but allow them to rest and recover themselves from the alarm, for they soon regain confidence, and rarely fly their haunts for long, for the loss of a member or two of the family. The old birds, though, are regular "artful dodgers," and a sportsman stands the best chance when they have gone out for a holiday, and left the young ones to enjoy themselves at home. The sight of a bird of prey breaks a covey into more pieces than the report of a gun, for then every one seems to look out for himself, and creeps into the first hole or corner it can find. To conclude, partridges shelter everywhere.

But the sound of those murderous shots, ever ringing in our ears, seems to sadden the feelings as we wander along, see and

the falling leaves careering before us, ruins of all that rendered Summer so green and lovely, unhoused, turned out from their shady dwelling-places, and wandering on to destruction, over the earth which they above all other things had adorned. Who can walk abroad at such a season without thinking of that change which must ere long take place—without turning a thought towards those who are gone—those whom we loved and conversed with, and with whom we have often wandered in Spring, in the leafy bloom of Summer, or in the solemn silence of Autumn? Sir Thomas Lander, while commenting upon Alison's "Nature and Principles of Taste," has made the following excellent remarks on the emotions awakened by watching the changes of the seasons, and very happily expressed what all sensitive natures feel while contrasting Spring and Autumn. He says:—

"The impression we feel from the scenery of Spring,—the soft and gentle green with which the earth is spread—the feeble texture of the plants and flowers—the young of animals just entering into life—and the remains of Winter yet lingering among the woods and hills,—all conspire to infuse into our minds somewhat of that fearful tenderness with which infancy is usually beheld. With such a sentiment, how innumerable are the ideas which present themselves to our imagination!—ideas, it is apparent, by no means confined to the scene before our eyes, or to the possible desolation which may yet await its infant beauty,—but which almost involuntarily extend themselves to analogies with the life of man, and bring before us all those images of hope or fear, which, according to our peculiar situations, have the dominion of our hearts. The beauty of Autumn is accompanied with a similar exercise of thought: the leaves then begin to drop from the trees—the flowers and shrubs with which the fields were adorned in the Summer months decay—the woods and groves are silent—the sun himself seems gradually to withdraw his light, or to become enfeebled in his power. Who is there who at this season does not feel his mind impressed with a sentiment of melancholy? or who is able to resist that current of thought, which, from such appearances of decay, so naturally leads him to the solemn imagination of

that inevitable fate which is to bring on alike the decay of life of empire, and of nature itself?"

Still, amid all these changes, much that is beautiful may yet be seen, especially in the colouring of the trees; and of all the changes in the autumnal foliage, that of the oak is generally the most pleasing, as there is a greater variety in its tints than can be found in that of any other tree; and in a wood of oaks every hue of the richest green and many-shaded brown is to be found.

Not that the colour of the oak is to be compared to the rich deep orange hue of the beech, which is, beyond question, the most beautiful of all autumnal colours, to an eye that loves a deep blaze; but look close, and you must turn to the foliage of the oak for variety after all, though the beech is a splendid tree, as the

preceding engraving shows; and we must not forget that Gilbert White has called it "the most lovely of all forest trees, whether we consider its smooth rind or bark, its glossy foliage, or graceful pendulous boughs."

Although the close of Autumn is somehow associated with the images of decay and death, there are fitful and cheerful glimmerings thrown around, "like hope upon a death-bed;" and we feel that this natural destruction of the remains of the beautiful Summer is necessary for the production of another and a fairer Spring. There is also something pleasant in the appearance of the well-filled rick-yards and barns; and we seem armed against the coming Winter when we look upon the stores that have been gathered from field, orchard, and garden, and garnered against the time when "the wind and rain beat dark December." Nor do we seem to care so much to see the leaves rotting, and the long grass withering, and the low leaden-coloured sky ever raining, in these busy autumnal days, as we should in the almost nightless season of Summer; the lengthened darkness brings with it the very necessity that confines us within doors.

There is something very beautiful about the great high heath-covered hills in Autumn, that come dipping down with crimson-clad feet into the open valleys. Scott used to say that he could never live unless he set his foot upon the heath once a year; and we know few spots that retain their dry elasticity so long as those on which the heath-bell waves; for, when all besides is saturated with moisture and decay, these are comparatively dry. Some such spot we often traversed in our younger years, that ran high above the surrounding woods; for, saving one narrow field-like entrance, woods encircled it every way. It had not been cultivated within the memory of man, nor probably ever had been. When the ling and heather had withered on the more open hills, here it remained as fresh as if it had but just bloomed; and even when December began to draw the curtain upon the close of the year, we have still found it as fresh as it seemed to have been in other places a month or two before.

The following humorous description of Autumn was written between two and three hundred years ago, but by whom we

know not, though we think it is attributed to Decker:—"Autumn's the barber of the year, that shears bushes, hedges, and trees; the ragged prodigal, that consumes all and leaves himself nothing; the arrantest beggar amongst all the four quarters; and never well, but always troubled with the falling sickness. This murderer of Spring, this thief to Summer, and bad companion to Winter, seems to come in according to his old custom, when the sun sets, like Justice, with a pair of scales in his hand, weighing no more hours to the day than he does to the night, as he did before in his vernal progress, when he rode on a ram. But this bald-pated Autumn will be seen walking up and down groves, meadows, fields, parks, and pastures, blasting of fruits, and beating leaves from their trees; when common highways shall be strown with boughs in mockery of Summer and in triumph of her death."

The resemblance the seasons bear to life, death, and resurrection, has not escaped the eyes of our old poets. They ever compared Spring to youth; the blowing and blossoming of the buds and flowers to the promises of future manhood, the fruits of which the full Summer would bring forth and ripen. Autumn, which brought perfection, was also the forerunner of dissolution; the same which caused the rose to shed its beauty as soon as it was attained, for such was ever Nature's course. Winter was that sleep in the grave which awoke to life in another Spring, whose flowers were eternal, and where there was neither death nor change again. Even so far back as the days of Homer, we find the decay of Autumn suggesting these very images, nor have we in any way been able to improve upon them. Shelley seems to have felt this when he said:—

> "Oh! wild West Wind! thou breath of Autumn's being—
> Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
> Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
> Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red—
> Pestilence-stricken multitudes. Oh! thou
> Who chariotest to their dark and wintry bed
> The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
> Each like a corpse within its grave, until
> Thine azure sister of the spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds, like flocks, to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill!
Make me thy lyre even as the forest is.
What if my leaves are falling like its own:
The tumult of the mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep autumnal love,
Sweet though in sadness! Be thou spirit-fierce;
My spirit, be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth."

There is something bordering on the sublime in this image of Autumn driving by in her windy chariot, and burying the winged seeds in their dark beds, "each like a corpse," until Spring awakens them at her green resurrection.

Every day in our rambles through the fields and woods we

see the flowers drop, that once bound the beautiful brow of Summer ; nor will Autumn triumph long, for the leaves will forsake her as the flowers have done her sweeter and fairer sister, for every wind that blows strips the "yellow season" of a portion of its splendour. The graceful fir-trees, which we are too apt to overlook, now command the eye by their dark beauty, and stand out like Egyptian Queens from among their fairer sisters of the forest, retaining their deep green hue to the last, and a more beautiful group than we here present never gladdened the eye of an artist, especially during his rambles through the Woods in Autumn ; though there are some splendid firs to be seen no farther from London than Greenwich Park, scattered about the Observatory, at the foot of the hill.

How wild and solemn must have been the Autumns in our primitive old English woods three or four thousand years ago ! when there was no human voice to cheer the solitude ; but, according to the earliest records we possess, nothing but bears, wolves, and the oxen with the high prominence, woods where the beaver built its house, and the badger is still found,—one of the few of that ancient family which has outlived the mammoth and the mastodon ; for we discover his fossil remains side by side with these huge and extinct monsters. He is the only representative of our cave bear, and seems not to have bated a jot of Bruin's valour. It appears that in the present day the badgers migrate from one part to another in large companies, sometimes numbering from ten to seventeen ; that they move along in the night, rank and file, in seemly and marching order, placing their young ones in the centre. In one or two instances, when they have been confronted, both man and dog were compelled to beat a retreat.

The favourite haunt of the badger was in the gloomy centre of one of those old woods, through which we wandered in Autumn, near a thicket that was impassable. Possessing long powerful claws, he there dug for himself a deep den, forming a somewhat winding and intricate entrance, into which he worked his long hardy body, not caring a straw for rubbing his coarse skin against the outer brambles or rugged sides of his subterra-

nean dwelling, so long as he had but plenty of room to turn himself when he reached his inner chamber. Here he couched all day long, and never ventured out to feed until late in the evening, or late in the night.

Though dull, heavy, and lazy, it is, upon the whole, a harmless brute, doing no injury to any one, but feeding upon roots, pig-nuts, acorns, beech-mast, and occasionally a long-tailed mouse or two, or even a few frogs or insects when nothing better may be had. Some naturalists assert that he is a great destroyer of wasps'-nests, and feeds upon the larvæ. He is, beyond doubt, the strongest-jawed animal of his size in Britain, and, even when baited by half-a-dozen dogs, if he once chances to get fairly hold, woe be to the assailant. When taken young he is said to be easily tamed, and to become as attached and affectionate as a dog; ready, also, to follow his master anywhere. Glad we are that the cruel custom of badger-baiting is now abandoned. Almost every inn-yard in the country had, a few years ago, its badger-tub, or box, in which dog and badger were mutually tortured. The dog which seized the badger the oftenest, and still retained his hold each time he went in until he was drawn forth by the tail, when the badger was made to release its hold, and the dog again sent in, according to its "bottom," was the winner. The method used for capturing the badger is by placing an open sack, with a running noose, in the earth where he harbours.

This is done while he is out feeding. When all is prepared, a loud hooting and whistling is made, and half-a-dozen dogs are also turned loose. The badger, alarmed, hurries off home, rushes into the sack that closes behind him, and is sacked.

Within the last few years I have seen young badgers offered for sale in the streets of London by a man named "Croydon Jack." The last I saw him with he had taken out of a "den" at Croydon Crook, which lies a little beyond Sanderstead; and poor little cold spiritless things they were. Young hedgehogs, snakes, frogs, little rabbits, hares, and squirrels, generally formed Jack's live stock; and in my country-loving eye they always seemed sadly out of place in the streets of London, though they carried the memory pleasantly away to the green old English forests.

Fox-hunting also gave life to the woods in Autumn, and it was a pleasant sight to see the hounds rush into cover to drive out Reynard, which we boys were often the first to espy, as he broke cautiously through the edge of the wood, and made for the open country. A pretty Autumn picture it was too, to see the hunters in their scarlet coats, riding up and down the heath beside the wood; or to see little groups rein up their horses, and converse together; or to catch sight of a scarlet jacket a mile away—now seen, now lost by some winding of the road,

high hedge-row, or clump of trees. To gaze on the figure of some lovely lady—

"The cynosure of neighbouring eyes—"

as her palfrey ambles to and fro, while the dogs express their impatience by whining, and looking up at the huntsman, who at last gives the signal, and exclaims, "Eu-in, Eu-in there, dogs," and into the covert they leap, in all kinds of picturesque places —one by the withered fern, another by the stem of the mighty oak, some beneath the gorse bushes, others over the moss-covered railings, and all in a few moments lost to the eye, while the huntsman listens with his head aside, for the opening cry of the hound which will first proclaim that Reynard is found. A great authority says, "Many huntsmen are fond of having hounds at their horses' heels; and it is a modern fashion for the huntsman and whippers-in to ride into the cover, and by their noise, in some measure, to find the fox for their hounds; but this proceeding is apt to render hounds bad drawers, independently of the great chance of stubbing the horses, which in a strong cover too often occurs, without needlessly courting the danger. It is liable, also, where there are but few finders, to have a fox found by them which goes down the wind, and they are heard of no more that day. Besides, hounds never get so well or so soon together as when they spread the cover."

If hounds will draw of themselves, it is the duty of every huntsman to save his horse from the sharp thorn-bushes, and the hooked brambles, and the piercing gorse, which tear the skin of a horse, enter his feet and legs, and make him restive all the day after. All eye, all ear, the head huntsman draws up beside the cover: he knows the voice of a skirker from that of a well-trained and staunch hound: all is for a time again silent; there is not a false babbler in the pack. Listen! now you hear them open! one bark is followed by another, then the whole pack joins in the cry, like the crash of a band of musicians. The fox is found, but he is in no hurry to start, though

"He often takes leave, but is loth to depart;"

for he must have a skulk or two somewhere, to mislead the hounds, and obtain a good start. Hark! that was the "Tally-

ho! tua-loo! Away, away!" He is seen making off from the cover, and now the chase commences. We see the first hound leap the low fence and clear the covert; he pauses for a moment, scents the spot, then throws back the joyous cry.

"Another and another still succeeds,"

each baying to his companion, who flings the tidings behind him, but has not time to stay, until, at last, the report reaches the farthest hound, and on they rush like a mob when the cry of "Stop thief!" is heard. Now the hounds are drawn together,

and away they go over hedge and ditch, clearing everything at a bound; for the whippers-in have done their work well, and not a dog lingers in the wake. The head huntsman keeps well up with his leading hounds. Now the fat old Squire is thrown into the hedge, and one hardly knows which is the reddest—the hips of the wild-rose or his own "jolly nose." The young lady's veil has caught in the branch of the tree which overhung the hedge she cleared in such gallant style, and now streams out like a banner in the breeze. Now a new-booted young farmer attempts to clear a "nasty-looking fence," which every one hitherto has wisely shunned, and, like "vaulting ambition," he comes down head foremost, breaks his horse's knees, ploughs up the earth with his head, and gets laughed at for his fool-hardiness.

Now the old farmer, who is at work in his fields, places his hands in his pockets, utters a few deep curses to himself, and mumbles something about broken necks, while calculating the cost of repairing the fences which the hunters have broken down. Now a group of famished pedestrians, who came out to see the "hounds throw off," invade the first turnip-field they reach, and looking with hungry eye on the sheep, think of gipsies, wood-fires, and huge pots suspended from three stakes, simmering gently in wild green lanes. Now little boys run to open gates for timid horsemen, and if a few pence are not thrown to them, begin to whistle long, low, desponding notes, and to kick about the dead leaves dreadfully. Now some old publican, whose house stands on a distant eminence, hopes that the fox may be killed near his door, or that some gentleman may be brought in with a broken collar-bone, whom it will be dangerous to remove for a month at least; he also reckons up the profit of a few British cheroots at threepence each, which cost him eight shillings a pound, then steps inside to add a little more water to the brandy in his decanter. Now a check occurs, at which some of the followers of the chase swear, while others feel thankful, as their horses were already blown. Some, who have lost their hats, tie handkerchiefs round their heads; and those who have been thrown, laugh very loud, though they look rather pale; and when they think they are not noticed, wince and writhe under hurts which they are ashamed to confess to. Now the gentleman who staked the hunter, which cost him one hundred guineas, comes up on foot, biting the end of his whip, while he exclaims, "Devilish good sport to-day."

"Gone away! in sad earnest the peals are commencing;
Here a farmer and steed promiscuously roll;
There a Leicestershire blade, on a glutton for fencing,
Takes a bullfinch and breaks a buck's neck in a hole.
My lad! pull that stake out—whoey! gently! od rot it,
(While the mare's in a fidget, the man's in a fright):
Do just stand aside, sir, and let me come at it.
Forward! forward! my boys! he's away to the right."

We must let Mr. Beckford come in at the death, which he does in true sporting style, as follows:—"Hark! they halloo!

Ay, there he goes. It is nearly over with him; had the hounds caught view he must have died. He will hardly reach the cover; see how they gain upon him at every stroke! It is an admirable race; yet the cover saves him. Now be quiet, and he cannot escape us; we have the wind of the hounds, and cannot be better placed. How short he runs! he is now in the very strongest part of the cover. What a crash! every hound is in, and every hound is running for him. That was a quick turn! Again another; he's put to his last shifts. Now Mischief (the hound) is at his heels, and death is not far off. Ha! they all stop at once; all silent, and yet no earth is open. Listen! now they are at him again. Did you hear that hound catch him? they overran the scent, and the fox had laid down behind him. Now, Reynard, look to yourself. How quick they all give their tongues. Little Dreadnought, how he works him! the terriers too, they are now squeaking at him. How close Vengeance pursues; how terribly she presses; it is just up with him. What a crash they make! the whole wood resounds! That turn was very short. There! now! ay, now they have him. Whoo hoop!" The above description is excellent; you fancy as if you were at his elbow all the time—that he could see into the covert, and knew every dog by sight and name; and—and—after all you feel sorry for the poor fox.

After the fox is killed, he is generally seized by the huntsman, who cuts off his brush and feet; sometimes his head also; then throws his carcass to the hounds. Formerly the body of the fox was suspended from the branch of some tree, at the foot of which the hounds congregated and chanted such a dirge round the dead body as must have been very trying to the ears of a sensitive man. What a scramble is there amongst the hounds for the carcass; each one trying to seize a portion, yet finding it impossible to reach the poor fox, without first eating their way through their companions of the pack. The work of destruction seldom lasts beyond four or five minutes, and at the expiration of that period not a vestige of Reynard remains.

In our eye the fox is a beautifully formed animal; and we have never seen his red skin and bushy tail sweeping through

the brown fern, or gliding stealthily along the edge of the forest, without a feeling of delight; for he is, beyond doubt, one of the oldest inhabitants of our ancient British woods. He went prowling about the roots of our primeval oaks, with his broad head and sharpened snout, ages before a Roman galley ever grazed the pebbles upon our beach; for we find his fossil remains amongst those of extinct animals, which, doubtless, lived in England long before the early Cymry sailed through the misty ocean, and named our coast "the country of sea-cliffs." Even then he burrowed in the ground during the day, and ranged abroad in the night, prowling about the forest-homes of the first ancient settlers, who erected their huts in the wild solitude of our gloomy old woods, and who, for aught we know, piled up the giant relics of Stonehenge. He is associated, in our mind, with many undated changes, and has a great claim on our respect for his antiquity alone. True, the fox is a thief; but it must live somehow; and who can tell what lesser vermin it may destroy, to make up for the few dozens of poultry which it occasionally carries off? That the fox is an affectionate mother we have proof, as she has been seen to carry off one of her cubs in her mouth, even when the hounds have been in pursuit of her: she has thus boldly endangered her life to save her young. Such a trait as this surely makes up for a thousand petty delinquencies. She is very partial to rabbits, and woe be to the warren on the edge of which she is located. When the fox sleeps, he coils himself round like a dog; he has a great objection to light, and few animals can see better in the twilight or dark than he can. The fox has before now been known to run twenty-five miles without a check, and in several instances which are on record has kept the lead of the hounds for an hour and a half.

We have once or twice in our lives, while sojourning at a lonely roadside inn, come in contact with that picturesque and nocturnal character—an Earth-stopper; who, with his little pony, terriers, lanthorn, spade, and mattocks, has just pulled up to drink his pint, before he sets out on his nightly round. Poor old fellow! on the night which precedes a hunt, he is compelled either to turn out of his warm bed, or leave his comfortable fire-

side, and, while the fox is out feeding, to stop up the entrance of his burrow or hole; so that when Reynard returns, he sees the door of his house closed, and is compelled to find a shelter where he can. Sometimes the old Earth-stopper has to make a circle of miles, and it is only in the middle of the night that his work can be done, for were he to stop the earths either early in the evening or in the morning, he would be likely enough to fasten up the fox in his burrow, instead of keeping him out, that he may be in readiness when the hunters meet. It is the Earth-

stopper's business to become acquainted with every hole which the fox hides in; and while he is out feeding, to stop these places up with thorns, furze-bushes, earth or stones; so that during the hunt on the following day the fox may not be able to run under the earth, and baffle the hounds; and many a wintry night is the old man out alone, following this cheerless occupation. I am no advocate of fox-hunting; I like to see its black feet pattering through the fallen leaves, for I have always thought it unfair that there should be so many men, horses, and hounds, to one poor fox. It is so unlike that old English system of fair play, which allows only of one enemy at a time.

Now the villagers are busily employed gathering the last clusters of the ripe elderberries, which having picked, they either make into wine, or carry to the neighbouring market

town, where they dispose of the fruit at eightpence or tenpence per gallon. A few groups of men, women, and children may yet be seen in the fields, blowing their fingers for very cold, during the first frosty mornings of Autumn, while they gather the heavy potatoes, pile them in their baskets, and carry them off to the lumbering cart to be stored up against the coming Winter. The ploughman and the sower are now in the fields, making ready and casting in the seed, which shoots up so early in the following year, and is the first to give that green and velvet-like look to the opening landscape of Spring. As the flowers die away, the evergreens seem to come out with a Summer-like freshness ; the holly and ivy have a greener and glossier look ; the alder still retains its vernal hue, and the hedges are hung with the crimson hips of the wild rose, the dark red berries of the hawthorn, and the gushing scarlet and emerald branches of the nightshade ; while below, the arums have risen up, stiff and perpendicular, like stems carved out of the richest coral.

I have before alluded to the beautiful days that often come in with the beginning of Autumn : the fine blue middle-tint that hangs over the landscape is never seen to greater perfection in England than at this season of the year, when the weather is settled.

Those who love to ramble in the country will find as much amusement and instruction now, as they did in the midst of Summer. For many a lovely nook, then hidden by masses of foliage, will now break in new beauty upon the eye. Weeds and flowers have run into seed ; and great is the variety of forms they have assumed in this new stage of existence. Urn, and cup, and bell, and ball, and vessels of almost every shape, stand laden with the flowers of another Summer ; and but wait for the strong winds to blow open the doors of their garners, that they may scatter their seeds upon the earth. But these will soon pass away, and then, intead of the faded foliage of Autumn, we shall see the hedges shorn of their withered leaves, and all bare and naked, saving where they are hung with hips and haws, or where the bright holly and the dark-leaved ivy throw over them a patch of green. We shall soon hear the wind howling about the house

at night, like a hungry wolf, and trying the doors and window-shutters, as if determined to enter; but finding no way there, getting into the chimney, and there bellowing, and moaning, and growling, as if it stuck fast. And while we listen to such sounds, we shall recall the darkness that reigns over the sea: the ships that are driven like Autumn leaves before the mighty storm; of shoals, and sand, and wrecks, and huge promontories lashed by the mountainous waves, that roll away, and go moaning along the beaten beach, as if hungry for their prey. We shall think of desolate moors, and lonely roads, and solitary toll-gates that stand on the edges of treeless commons, or between the wild sweep of lonesome woods where groaning branches ever utter deep dolorous sounds, as if moaning for very pain—places where travellers have been waylaid, and where gibbet-posts stand, whose irons ever swing and creak. Spots that have

A weird-like and eerie look,
As, if murder lurked anywhere, there it would be:
Ruinous, shadowy, fearsome, and lone,
Abounding with whispers that seem not their own,
Where sounds, not of earth, shake each grey old ash-tree.

BIRDS IN AUTUMN.

WOODCOCK — SWALLOWS — MARTINS — PARTRIDGES—REDWING—CORNCRAKE —AQUATIC BIRDS—FIELD-FARE—CANADIAN GEESE—MIGRATION OF BIRDS —SKYLARKS IN AUTUMN—SNIPES—YOUNG ROBINS — GOLDEN-CRESTED WRENS.

FAR over the roar of the ever-restless ocean, to other lands beyond the sea, spanned by other rainbows and still lighted with a Summer sunshine, have many of our sweetest songsters long since flown. Others are preparing for their departure, and the little robin—his crimson breast scarcely distinguishable from the red

decaying leaves amid which he stands half-hidden — pipes a farewell to those that are about to leave him, with something like a look of pity in his eye; while the golden-crested wren —that pretty fairy of British birds—shakes the plumes in its orange helmet, and seems in its low song to cry, "Shame, shame, to be afraid of staying through the Winter, when such a little thing as I am remain behind." The cuckoo and nightingale were the first to leave us, then others followed gradually one by one, leaving a silence here and there, where before there was a reign of melody. We look round in vain for the pretty whitethroat—it has vanished; the song of the willow-warbler is heard no more; the note of the chiff chaff is hushed; the flycatcher is nowhere to be seen, and the low-voiced garden-warbler is gone—

"The daughters of music are silent."

But though so many have departed, every week brings us fresh arrivals, and foremost amongst these is the woodcock, which

generally arrives in the night, and is a pretty ornament to our Winter woods, with its black, grey, and dim yellow plumage, dashed with dusky streaks. The bill of this bird is very sensitive; so much so, that some naturalists say it can feel its prey in the dark with this long delicate beak. Now and then, though very rarely, its nest has been found in England, built of dry

leaves, moss, and grass, containing four or five eggs, spotted ash-coloured grey and brown, on a ground of yellowish white. What this bird ate was for some time even a mystery to Gilbert White, though it is now well known that its food consists principally of worms; and woodcock-shooters know pretty well where he is to be found, by the appearance of the fallen leaves; for they have assured us, that in searching for worms, the woodcock turns up the leaves right and left, laying one on each side alternately, along the whole track where he has been busy worm-hunting.

Some naturalists say that in Winter they keep dropping in from the Baltic singly, or in pairs, till December, and always land in the night, or in dark misty weather; but are never seen to arrive, though frequently discovered the next morning in any ditch which affords them shelter after the extraordinary fatigue occasioned by the adverse gales which they often have to encounter in their aërial voyage. They do not remain near the shores longer than a day, when they are sufficiently recruited to proceed inland; then they visit the very same haunts they left the preceding season. In temperate weather they retire to mossy moors, and high bleak mountainous parts; but as soon as the frost sets in and the snows begin to fall, they seek lower and warmer situations, with boggy grounds and springs, and little oozing mossy rills, which are rarely frozen, where they shelter in close bushes of holly and furze, and the brakes of woody glens, or in dells which are covered with underwood: here they remain concealed during the day, and remove to different haunts, and feed only in the night. From the beginning of March to the end of that month, and sometimes to the middle of April, they all keep drawing towards the coasts, and avail themselves of the first fair wind to return to their native woods. The snipe also comes now, and inhabits similar situations. It is migratory, and met with in all countries; like the woodcock, it shuns the extremes of heat and cold, by keeping upon the bleak moors in Summer, and seeking the shelter of the valleys in winter. In unfrozen boggy places, runners from springs, or any open streamlets of water, they are often found in considerable numbers.

The martin makes its appearance later, and leaves us much earlier than the common swallow, but why, it is difficult to tell; when the air is still filled with its favourite food, and Summer, at some seasons, still reigns in all her beauty. Can it be that the martin journeys farther than the swallow? We can assign no better reason for its early departure. The trouble of rearing its brood is over, the young birds are strong, and able to fly anywhere; there is food for them in abundance. Yet, with all these things in their favour, the martins leave us, just at the very time when we should imagine they would remain and enjoy themselves. There is something very wonderful in the habits of all the swallow tribe, and although we have made some advance since Gilbert White's time, we have still much to learn.

Swallows for some time before congregate, preparatory to their migration, and their numbers are daily augmented, until they

become a vast flock, often amounting to thousands,—so great indeed, that the spectator would almost conclude that the whole of the swallow race were collected on one spot. One year they assembled in this way in a large osier-holt, beside the river Trent, and it was their custom while there to rise from the willows in the morning a little before six o'clock, when their thick columns seemed to darken the sky. Their divisions were formed into four, five, and sometimes six grand wings, each of these filing off and taking a different route—one east, another west, another south, and so on,—as if not only to be equally dispersed throughout the country, to provide food for their numerous troops, but also to

collect such of their fellows or straggling parties as might be still left behind. Just before the respective columns arose, a few birds were first observed in motion at different points, darting through their massy ranks: these appeared like officers giving the word of command. In the evening, about five o'clock, they began to return to their station, and continued coming in from all quarters till near dark. It was here that you might see them go through their various aërial evolutions in many a sportive ring and airy gambol, strengthening their pinions in these playful feats for their long journey: a thousand pleasing twitters arose from their little throats, as they cut the air and frolicked in the last beams of the setting sun, or lightly skimmed the surface of the river.

About the middle of October this mighty army broke up its encampment, debouched from the osier-holt, and, rising, covered the heavens with their legions,—thence directed by an unerring guide,—and took their trackless way. On the morning of their going, when they ascended, they did not, as had been their wont, divide into different columns and each take a different route, but went off in one vast body, bearing to the south. Old men said that they would have gone sooner, but for a contrary wind which had for some time prevailed, and that on the day before they took their departure, the wind got round, and the favourable breeze was immediately embraced. On the day of their flight they left behind them about a hundred of their companions: whether they were slumberers in the camp, and so had missed the going of their troops, or whether they were left as the rear-guard, it was not easy to ascertain;—they remained, however, till the next morning, when the greater part of them took flight to follow, as it seemed, the route of their departed legions. After these a few stragglers only remained: these might be too sick or too young to attempt so great an expedition;—whether this was the fact or not, they did not remain after the next day. If they did not follow their army, yet the dreary appearance of their depopulated camp and their affection for their kindred might influence them to attempt it, or to explore a warmer and safer retreat. Some few we noticed several

days after, flying about the old bridge; but by the end of October all had gone.

Those who have paid any attention to the habits of swallows in Autumn, must have noticed their restlessness before migration. It seems impossible for them to remain quiet anywhere for more than a few moments. They seem as if loth to go, yet are afraid to remain. There is an evident uneasiness amongst them, like tenants who have received notice to quit, and can no longer look upon the houses in which they have passed so many happy hours as their own. The sweet rivers and green meadows of Old England have still a charm for them, and fain would they, were it not for our bleak Winters, remain with us all the year. So have we interpreted their twitterings, as we have watched them

for hours in our younger days, while idling happily along the banks—now throwing in the line where we saw the fish playing —then stooping down to gather some beautiful Autumn flower; or listening to their pleasant twittering, while wondering how they would fare on their long perilous voyage, while they,

> "Ranged in figure, wedge their way,
> Intelligent of seasons, and set forth
> Their aëry caravan, high over seas
> Flying, and over lands, with mutual wing
> Easing their flight. The air
> Floats as they pass, fanned with unnumber'd plumes."

We find the migration of birds alluded to in the Old Testament—a proof that the habits of these winged voyagers were the same three thousand years ago. For in the book of Jeremiah it is written, that "The stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times: and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming." In Mr. Couch's interesting work on Animal Instinct, of which I have, more than once, made favourable mention, I find the following original observations on the migration of birds:—"The time of the withdrawal of the swallows and martins is more irregular than that of their coming, and begins with the swift, which usually takes its flight in the first or second week of August—the whole colony disappearing at once—the actual departure being preceded, for a few days, by exercises in flying, which seem to be practising in sport what they soon expect seriously to execute. They may be witnessed ascending in a spiral manner, and in very close phalaux, with even more than their usual rapidity, to a very great height; and having two or three times executed this movement, they suddenly sink down to their nests, after which, till the next day, they are no more to be seen. A remark often made—that the swallow tribe go away earliest in the warmest seasons—appears to be correct; but whether there be any physiological reason for this, is a matter of doubt. The principal cause of their early readiness for migration seems to be, that less interruption has been thrown in the way of the formation of the nest; and that there has been a greater abundance of insect

food for the support of the young, which has accelerated their growth. In an unfavourable season in these respects, or when other causes have occurred to retard the maturity of the brood, the birds have not only been kept later, but in many instances the migratory instinct has grown sufficiently strong to overcome the force of parental affection, and the brood has been left to perish in the nest. To attend on a helpless young one, a single swift has been known to remain for a fortnight after the departure of its companions; and it is a frequent occurrence for the swallow to leave its brood to perish in the nest. As Autumn approaches, the swallows return to their nests only for the sake of sleep, or as a convenient resting-place; and about the middle of September, after having shown their social disposition by assembling in companies, the earliest of them enter upon their autumnal migration, for which the proper season is the month of October. The flight to their winter's destination is less direct than their coming; so that it is not uncommon for small parties to appear again, long after they have seemed to have left us. Such is frequently the case in November."

"The golden woodpecker laughs loud no more;
The pye no longer prates; no longer scolds
The saucy jay. Who sees the goldfinch now
The feather'd groundsel pluck, or hears him sing
In bower of apple blossoms perch'd? Who sees
The chimney-haunting swallow skim the pool,
And quaintly dip, or hears his early song
Twitter'd to dawning day? All, all are hushed."—HURDIS.

We have frequently noticed that, soon after the swallows have departed, the low landscape along the river was buried in a misty haze for several mornings together, and very seldom before they migrated. It is no doubt the same now. Its progress can be traced as it first slowly arises from the river, spreads over the low meadow beside its banks, burying in its folds hedge, and style, and tree; and looking as if the clouds had dropped down, settled upon, and shut out the scenery. The meadow paths were wet and damp; there was a clammy moisture about the fallen leaves—a slipperiness on the footways

which the trees overhang—a reeking of vapours that ascended the air—all telling that the work of decay was slowly progressing, and that Nature was busy preparing a bed for the far-distant flowers of Spring, and all these changes the swallows understood. But, amid all this silent desolation, at no season of the year have the objects whose shadows fall upon the water so beautiful an appearance as now, when the sky is clear. Masses of foliage no longer darken the deep mirror, but far down falls the sharp outline of the trees, and in depths which look unfathomable we see the clear blue of heaven and the white silver of the moving cloud beautifully reflected. Sometimes we saw imaged, as they sailed slowly across later in the season, long lines of water-fowl, which were ever shifting their ranks into arrow-headed shapes and broken triangles, as the vaulted sky rang back the harsh scream which they now and then uttered.

Partridges now resort to the stubble-fields, having been compelled to retreat to cover during the noise and stir attendant upon gathering in the harvest. They prefer, when they have young ones, to nestle in the open fields, as they have there a better chance of escaping from stoats and weasels. Wood-owls are now heard hooting in the night; and during a heavy gale of wind, which brings down thousands of leaves at a gust, the rattling of the branches and the hooting of the owls form a very solemn concert, especially at midnight, to the ears of a lonely wayfarer who is making a short cut homeward through an old wood. The air is also now filled with winged emigrants, the down of thistles and dandelions, which go sailing away over many a broad field before they alight and pitch their tents, in which they sleep throughout the winter—then rise up in a new form in the coming Spring. What a beautiful picture is now presented, when the flock is driven to the fold as the day declines, its scattered members converging towards a point as they enter the narrow opening of their nightly inclosure, which they gradually fill and settle into as a shallow stream runs into a bed that has been prepared for it, and there settles into a still pool. And again, in the early morning, when the slender barrier that confines them is removed, they crowd and hurry out, gently

intercepting each other; and, as they get free, pour forth their white fleeces over the open field, as a lake that has broken its bank pours its waters over the adjoining land; in each case the bells and meek voices of the patient people making music as they move, and the shepherd standing carelessly by leaning on his crook—even as shepherds did in the vale of Arcadia in the days of old. Nor is the woodland music wholly silent, for a few birds yet sing, as if in answer to the sheep-bells; and amongst

these late songsters is the beautiful redwing, which arrives about the close of October, or a week or two before the fieldfare; and, when the Winters are severe, Mr. Yarrell informs us it has been observed "that the redwings are unable to bear hard weather so well as the fieldfares. While in this country the redwings inhabit parks and pleasure-grounds, or any places containing clumps of trees; and, like the common thrush, which they resemble in appearance, they seek food in open weather in pasture lands and moist meadows, feeding principally on worms, snails, and other soft-bodied animals. They are much less inclined to feed on berries than most of the thrush tribe; and, should the resources usually obtained be closed against them by

severe weather, are the first among birds to suffer; and during some severe seasons, such as 1799, 1814, and 1822, hundreds have been found almost starved, alike unable to prosecute their journey farther south to more congenial countries, or to bear the rigour of this. Linnæus, several times in his "Tour in Lapland," mentions the song of the redwing, "whose amorous warblings from the top of a spruce fir," he says, "were delightful; its high and varied notes rivalling those of the nightingale herself." Other writers praise the wild notes of this bird, and mention that in Sweden and Norway, where it breeds, it is excessively shy when any one approaches its nest.

The corn-crake may still be heard if the season is not too far advanced, especially in fields where clover has been sown along with barley. These birds, says a great authority, Mr. Yarrell, are excellent game for young sportsmen, as they fly very slowly with their legs hanging down, and seldom go farther than to the nearest hedge; while they are so highly prized as food, that it was formerly said two landrails are a present for a queen. The corn-crake or landrail will put on the appearance of death when exposed to danger from which it cannot escape; and Mr. Jesse relates the following incident in proof of this assertion:—"A gentleman had a corn-crake brought to him by his dog, to all appearance quite dead. As it lay on the ground, he turned it over with his foot, and felt convinced that it was dead. Standing by, however, in silence, he suddenly saw it open an eye. He then took it up; its head fell; its legs hung loose, and it appeared again quite dead. He then put it in his pocket, and before long he felt it all alive, and struggling to escape. He then took it out; it was as lifeless as before. Having laid it again upon the ground, and retired to some distance, the bird in about five minutes warily raised its head, looked round, and decamped at full speed." There are two other kinds of corn-crake beside the common species: the one is called the spotted corn-crake, and is very prettily marked with white spots on the wings; and the other, which is called the little crake, is of an olive-brown colour, and much smaller than the other kinds.

The rapidity with which the corn-crake glides through the

grass is amazing. If sound gives a correct idea of distance, you hear it one moment, as it seems, close at hand, and in a few seconds its voice sounds from the very opposite side of the field. The very form of the bird is well adapted for this rapid gliding

betwixt the thickest grass or the closest-sown corn, with its snake-like head, and breast formed like the bow of a fast-sailing ship. I have more than once seen it cut in two by the mowers, the bird having squatted so low among the grass, and remained so still, that its "whereabout" was not discovered until the sharp scythe had stopped its cry for ever. It migrates about the end of October.

The harsh screaming of aquatic fowls as they pass over us may be often heard at night, when they themselves are unseen. Cranes, storks, geese, and ducks, all fly by night as well as by day; and the stork is the only one of them which is not clamorous: he takes to wing in silence, and pierces the aërial regions unheard. The cranes, on the contrary, are the most sonorous: a flight of them was seen in this country, at Hackney in Middlesex: they soared at an immense height. The flight of cranes has been always notable, and Homer has a beautiful passage in the third Iliad, in which he compares their bold flight to the march of the Trojan phalanx. In the summer they spread themselves over the north of Europe and Asia as far as the Arctic Circle, and in the winter are met with in the warmer

regions of India, Syria, Egypt, &c. and at the Cape of Good Hope. The course of their flight is discovered by the loud noise they make, for they soar to such a height as to be hardly visible to the naked eye. Like the wild geese, they form themselves into different figures, describing a wedge, a triangle, or a circle. It is said that they formerly visited the fens and marshes of this island in large flocks; but they have now entirely forsaken it.

Storks have been seen in Alsace, and also in Holland, as late as the end of August; no doubt they abide there much later: before they take their departure from their northern summer residence they assemble in large flocks, and seem to confer on the plan of their projected route. Though they are very silent at other times, on this occasion they make a singular clattering noise with their bills, and all seems bustle and consultation. It is said that the first north wind is the signal for their departure, when the whole body become silent, and move at once, generally in the night; and, taking an extensive spiral course, they are soon lost in the air.

The heron is not actually migratory, but traverses the country to a great distance in quest of some convenient or favourite fishing spot, and in its aërial journeys soars to a great height, to which the eye is directed by its harsh cry, uttered from time to time while on the wing. In flying, it draws the head between the shoulders, and the legs stretched out seem, like the longer tails of some birds, to serve the office of a rudder. The motion of their wings is heavy and flagging, and yet they get forward at a greater rate than would be imagined.

The elevated and marshalled flight of the wild geese seems dictated by geometrical instinct: shaped like a wedge, they cut the air with less individual exertion; and it is conjectured that the change of form from an inverted V, an A, an L, or a straight line, is occasioned by the leader of the van quitting his post at the point of the angle through fatigue, dropping into the rear, and leaving his place to be occupied by another.

Forster in his "Perennial Calendar" says, "When great abundance of winter migratory birds, and particularly field-

fares, arrive early, they usually forebode a hard winter. The same prognostic of a severe winter is to be inferred from the early or numerous migration of wild geese, wild ducks, and other winter fowls, or the appearance of sea-gulls in inland marshes."

The early arrival of the fieldfare was considered ominous of a severe winter centuries ago, and another sign, which Forster does

not mention, was a large crop of hips and haws. There is an old rhyme still extant in the midland counties which says:

"Autumn hips and haws
Brings a winter nip nose."

Gilbert White tells us, that although the fieldfare obtains its food in the hedges and builds on very high trees, yet while with us it roosts on the ground. As a proof of this, he says, that those who catch larks in nets during the night frequently net the fieldfare, especially in stubble-fields, while those who capture redwings in the hedges at night never catch the fieldfare. "Why these birds," he adds, "in the matter (manner) of roosting should differ from all their congeners and from themselves also, with respect to their proceedings by day, is a fact for which I am by no means able to account." We have no work at our elbow that answers this question; but this we know, that rooks,

which are in the habit of roosting on trees, settle all night on Salisbury Plain, where they find plenty of food during the day-time, and where there are no trees to roost upon unless they fly miles away. Nor are these the only instances of birds acting differently to what we call their general habits, as I have before instanced in the house-sparrows, that were so persecuted, they left the farmhouse altogether and built their nests in some neighbouring trees.

The Canada or cravat goose is only occasionally seen in this country: it is a remarkably beautiful bird, with a glossy black neck and white cheeks, which render it, as Mr. Waterton observes, "so particularly conspicuous, that those who have seen it once can never be at a loss to recognise it when viewed among all the other species of the goose tribe. There can be nothing," continues Mr. Waterton, "more enlivening to rural solitude than the trumpet-sounding notes of the Canada goose. They can be heard here [at Walton Hall] at most hours during the day, and often during the night." Mr. Waterton afterwards bought two barnacle geese at Rotterdam, and on their arrival at Walton Hall, they were turned on the lake in company with the Canadian geese. The following autumn one of these little barnacle ganders paired with a large old Canadian goose, and a nest having been made on the island the ill-assorted pair took possession of it, and the goose, having laid her eggs, began to sit. "Nothing," says Mr. Waterton, "could exceed the assiduity with which the little barnacle stood guard, often on one leg, over his bulky partner, day after day, as she was performing her tedious task. If anybody approached the place, his cackling was incessant; he would run at him with the fury of a turkey-cock; he would jump up at his knees, and not desist in his aggressions until the intruder had retired." At last two young geese were produced; and the vociferous gesticulations and struttings of the little gander were beyond all endurance when he first got sight of his long-looked-for progeny. The hybrids were elegantly shaped, and neither so large as the mother nor so small as the father, and partook of the colours of both parents.

The following excellent remarks on "the migration of birds"

were made by Dr. Collingwood at the meeting of the British Association for 1858, and appeared in the "Athenæum," from the pages of which they are now quoted.

"The author began by remarking upon the extreme interest of the phenomena of migration to the ornithologist, and the simplicity of the general plan, which had been unnecessarily complicated by the supporters of the now exploded doctrines of hybernation and submergence. The fact that those birds which winter here (except in those very rare cases which prove the rule) never breed with us, is the true key to those phenomena. The fieldfare and redwing are impelled northward in April, by the same impulse which brings the nightingale and blackcap to us from the south. All retire from the advancing sun in Spring; and all seek those spots where they themselves first saw the light, there to rear their young. This business ended, they again retire to regions more constitutionally fit for them in the dead season. The sun, therefore, is the great moving power, and the equinoxes the signals for migration. A sexual impulse, arising from the development of the reproductive organs, drives them before the advancing sun in Spring,—a failure of temperature and food, added to that of the reproductive stimulus, makes them follow the retiring sun in Autumn. The author suggested, arguing from the analogy of the short internal migrations of some British birds, that the period of time during which a bird remains in this country in summer might be taken as an index of the distance southwards to which he retires for the rest of the year,—that the chiff-chaff, for example, which spends fully six months of the year with us, retires to a much less distance in winter than the swift, which remains absent from us nine months out of the twelve. The conditions under which birds exist in warmer latitudes in the winter season are probably the same as regulate those which remain, the only difference being one of constitution or hardihood; that is, that our birds of passage require the higher temperature, simply to keep them in the same state of active life which our indigenous birds maintain under our wintry skies. As an example of these conditions, the fact that of our migratory birds the males arrive usually

a week or ten days in advance of the females, seems to show that a separation of the sexes takes place with them, such as is so common a phenomenon with our indigenous birds at that season. That the migratory birds arrive in full song, the author was convinced from observation, it having frequently happened that a careful watch for their first appearance had been rewarded at length by hearing just so much of their note as was sufficient for one well acquainted with it to recognise them; but on the following day the woods were resonant with the perfect notes of the very same bird. The recurrence of this observation had convinced him that fatigue alone had been the cause of their mutilated song the previous day. Attention was next directed to the great discrepancy which existed between the mere date of arrival of the summer birds of passage, as given by different ornithologists. The mean dates given by White, Markwick, Jenyns and another for twenty-five Summer birds of passage were presented in a tabular form, and exhibited a variation of as much as a month or six weeks for the same bird. This arises probably from the fact, that the experience of a single individual is liable to fallacy, that he may not have the same opportunities of accurate investigation in two consecutive years. Consequently, certain dates in a series of observations are much too late; and these, when reduced to a general mean, destroy the balance of the whole. A comparison of the earliest dates given by seven ornithologists, for the same twenty-five birds, gave much more equable results, because probably that observation was made under the best circumstances, and therefore most in accordance with truth. Still, however, there was something to be accounted for,—some influence which in certain seasons somewhat accelerated them, and in others retarded them. The question arises, Whence does this influence arise? Surely not at the point for which they are making, but rather at that from whence they are setting out." [This is a great truth well put, for what can birds know, that are still over the sea, whether we have here a forward or a backward Spring?] "We should not expect, therefore, that birds would necessarily arrive sooner in a forward season, nor later in

a backward one; and experience proves what reason would suggest, that the actual temperature of our Spring is not intimately connected with the earlier or later appearance of the migratory birds. The author, however, purposed making a more careful comparison between the records of the arrival of the birds, and the meteorological indications, than he had been able to do hitherto, with a view to elucidate this subject. With regard to the destination of our Summer birds in Winter, a large series of direct experiments was necessary to the proper comprehension of the length and direction of the lines which they followed."

Another gentleman suggested that birds appeared in particular districts which afforded the earliest supply of food, and that some were found near water sooner in the season than they were in spots where water did not abound. It was further asserted, that "temperature influenced the appearance of birds, and that, as the weather varied, so would they be seen in the north or south of the country."

The skylark, which remains with us all the year, and is generally silent during the hot summer months, frequently re-commences singing while the few fine days last which often shine out towards the close of Autumn. Markwick, in his Calendar, puts down the 12th of January as the earliest day he heard it sing, and the 13th of November as the latest. I heard several singing on the Downs, to the right of Sanderstead, near Croydon,

in December, 1849. I must, however, state that the month was so mild that thousands of primroses were in flower in Sanderstead woods, and all the way along the road up to Croydon Crook; and no doubt it was this mildness of the Winter which caused the skylark to sing so late—or early, as the birds themselves might believe from the quantity of flowers then blowing all around. Who that has seen this beautiful bird soaring and singing, has not felt what I did when long ago I wrote—

> The broad unbounded sky is all thine own,
> The silvery-sheeted heaven is thy domain,
> No landmark there, no hand to drag thee down,
> Sole monarch of the blue eternal plain.
> To thee is airy space far stretching given,
> The most unmeasured floor of the broad star-paved heaven.
> Thine is a glorious way,
> Pavilioned all around with golden-spreading day.

The Rev. J. G. Wood, in his "Illustrated Natural History," tells us of a skylark "that was taken out to America by a poor emigrant, and which used to collect crowds of delighted listeners round its cage. An English settler, who happened to be passing while the bird was singing, was so affected by the reminiscences which its song called up, that he offered his horse and cart for the bird on the spot." But the owner would not sell it for any money, and kept it until he died. After the owner's death, when the skylark passed into other hands, it would only sing when hung in the open air.

Along with the woodcock comes the snipe, though some say the snipe is a week later before making its appearance. There is a great resemblance in the habits of these two birds, though the snipe is far the most difficult to shoot. It is very partial to a watery neighbourhood, and there the food it is fondest of mostly abounds—such as worms, which it easily finds by thrusting its long bill into the soft wet ground. Its beak is covered with nerves, which must make the touch very sensitive, more so perhaps than anything we can judge of by the touch of our own hands. It must also possess a fine scent, as it scarcely ever plunges its beak into the ground without finding its prey: some

have thought this may be owing to its sensitive hearing, which enables the snipe to catch the sound of the slightest movement underground.

Snipes are too shy to permit any one to approach near enough to observe their habits with the naked eye; but through a telescope they may be watched feeding in marshy ground near rivers, when it will be found that they strike their long bills almost up to the head into the soft mud, and almost always bring up a worm. The snipe generally draws its beak back with a jerk, and runs a few paces, holding the worm in its beak, before it swallows it; but as soon as the worm has disappeared, the bird again makes a plunge, and brings up another, and in this manner it eats an amazing quantity of worms. The head of the snipe is admirably fitted for the manner in which the bird obtains its food. The head is heavy, and somewhat square in front, and the eyes, which are very large, are placed so far back in the head as to enable it to see truly.

He who is afraid of getting wet, or has a dread of cold hands and feet, must never hope to become a thorough good snipe-shooter; for the familiar haunts of this bird are the reedy and sluicy marsh, and the low, damp, meadow lands, fringed with pollard-willows, where a man of a delicate constitution is more likely to catch the ague than anything else. Onward the down-right sportsman must plunge, if he hopes to start his birds, up to the knees in mud or mire; and he may thank his stars if at the next step he is not up to his neck, imitating the boom of the bittern as he sputters back the oozy mixture with his lips. Neither must he wait for a fine calm day; but when it blows "great guns," sally out, for then the snipe lie well, and the best sport is to be found. A snipe, when it first rises, is more difficult to hit than a woodcock—giving so many twists and turns, that for the life of you you cannot tell what direction it will take for a second or two, except that it is sure to fly against the wind. The best plan is to wait a bit, until he has made up his mind what course to steer, and has become a little steady in his movements: that is the time to take a steady aim at him. A cross shot is preferable, when it can be had. The author of the

"Oakleigh Code" says: "The shooter will bring down a snipe with much less difficulty at from fifteen to twenty paces than at any other distance. The aim is thus taken just before the bird begins to make its cross-flight, but before it has attained its full speed. The irregularity of its flight is of little consequence during the first and second twisting, before the bird is safely on the wing, since its flight is then comparatively tardy. But let the snipe fly ten yards from whence it sprung—let it be, for instance, twenty-five paces distant from the gun; it is then at the top of its speed, and in the very midst of its sidelong, elliptical gyrations, and more than a match for the majority of shooters."

In snipe-shooting the ground ought to be gone over twice or thrice during the day, so apt is the bird to return to the spot from whence he first started. We knew an old sportsman in Lincolnshire, who always went over the same ground at least twice in the same day, and few shot more birds than he did. When he chose his own day, he often brought home ten or twelve brace. He never went out without his favourite retriever (the only dog he took), to save himself from getting a wet jacket, as the birds, when shot, often fell into the deep and wide water-courses with which these extensive marshes abound.

Bats, which country people believe to be birds, and of which it will take many long years to convince them to the contrary, are

now busy flitting about in the fine Autumn evenings; but we shall reserve our description of these curious little mammals for Winter, when they hybernate. Robins also belong to the same cheerless season, though it is more in place here to state that the young robins which were hatched in Spring begin to sing now, although they have but recently moulted, and for the first time wear the red feathers on their breasts. A month or two ago you would find it very difficult to tell the young robins from the young redstarts, so much are they alike, especially the blue-throated redstart. But there is no difficulty after the robin has donned his crimson honours, and the young redstart hung out his fine blue feath- ; then you see at a glance what a difference there is between the two birds.

But one of my little favourites is the golden-crested wren, which is to British birds what the harvest-mouse is to British quadrupeds, the smallest of its race; that is, as a native of our islands, for there are humming-birds much smaller; and, I verily believe, were a golden-nob stripped of his feathers, we have a few great blundering "bumble-bees," as country people call them, quite as large as the golden-crested wren. And he is such a beautiful little fellow! so courageous too, and stays with us all the year round; and yet, with all his feathers on, he measures but little more than three inches in length. There is no tree too high for him, for he will mount to the very top of the tallest poplar that ever grew, and there sit and sing as if he were "monarch of all he surveyed." What bright lively eyes the beautiful little fellow has got; then his bright golden tissue of feathers, all standing erect when the Autumn wind pipes loud, and which he does not seem to mind a jot, however high he may be, for no bird can keep a firmer hold with his claws than our golden-crowned favourite; indeed, if he could not, he would be blown away in Winter, into the immensity of space, or somewhere,—he is such a mite of a thing; and as for weight, why, he only weighs about seventy grains; and it would take about a hundred like him to bump down a pound weight, and eight times as many of his little lady's eggs to do the same. In very severe weather it visits the dwellings of man, like the

robin, though it can survive cold longer than the redbreast, or at least obtain food in its wild haunts longer, before it approaches our habitations, and this on account of its lightness, which enables it to seek food on the very edge of such slender sprays as would not bear the weight of the robin. Although

its note is low, it is very pleasant to the ear; all the more so, perhaps, through singing when so many other birds are silent. Then it is pleasant to see it hopping about the ivy and holly, when nearly all else beside is naked; and when we bear in mind how it labours to feed its young, we must acknowledge that it is worthy of its golden crown, and the very monarch of little birds. For sixteen hours a day, making six-and-thirty journeys both ways,

which is seventy-two each hour, there and back, has it been known to carry food to its young ones at the same rate throughout the whole sixteen hours, without cessation. And here is the portrait of our little beauty, the very flower of birds in Autumn, and golden-crowned king of birds in the coming Winter.

FOREST SCENERY.

FORESTS IN THE OLDEN TIME—SWINEHERD—SHERWOOD FOREST—STAG HUNTING—ORIGINAL INHABITANTS OF FORESTS—HAWKING—AUTUMN PICTURES.

ENGLAND, in ancient times, was, with the exception of its mountains, meres and marshes, principally overgrown with trees

and wild underwood, having the appearance of an immense forest. Some portions of what were forest-lands in the times of the ancient Britons are still remaining to this day. A strange pathless wilderness must our island have been at this remote period.

The sunsets of those old and forgotten Summers flashed not as now on tall spires and crowded cities, but gilded the tops of hoary trees, that stretched over leagues of unexplored forest-land, where the tusked wild-boar harboured, the maned bison bellowed, and the broad-winged eagle screamed high over all. When the deep midnight settled down over that gloomy Land of Trees, the silence was broken by the long howl of the hungry wolf as he prowled round the wattled hut of the old Cymry, ravenous for prey.

What now form the velvet valleys of England were then in many places plashy marshes and lake-like meres; where the black bullrush grew, and the sword-like water-flags made husky answers to the cutting winds. There also the wild swan floated, plumed herself, and arched her neck of silver undisturbed by either the voice or the footfall of man.

Sir Walter Scott, in the opening of his "Ivanhoe," has given the most beautiful description of one of these ancient forests I have ever met with; and as he was a great lover of Forest Scenery, I will enrich my pages with the following brief master-piece; every touch is happy; every morsel of colour exquisitely placed:—

"The sun was setting upon one of the rich grassy glades of Sherwood Forest. Hundreds of broad short-stemmed oaks, which had witnessed perhaps the stately march of the Roman soldiery, flung their broad, gnarled arms over a thick carpet of the most delicious greensward; in some places they were intermingled with beeches, hollies, and copsewood of various descriptions, so closely as totally to intercept the level beams of the sinking sun; in others they receded from each other, forming those long sweeping vistas, in the intricacy of which the eye delights to lose itself, while imagination considers them as the paths to yet wilder scenes of sylvan solitude. Here the red

rays of the sun shot a broken and discoloured light, that partially hung upon the shattered boughs and mossy trunks of the trees, and there they illuminated in brilliant patches the portions of turf to which they made their way. A considerable open space in the midst of this glade seemed formerly to have been dedicated to the rites of druidical superstition; for, on the summit of a hillock, so regular as to seem artificial, there still remained part of a circle of rough unhewn stones of large

dimensions. Seven stood upright; the rest had been dislodged from their places, probably by the zeal of some convert to Christianity, and lay, some prostrate near their former site, and others on the side of the hill. One large stone only had found its way to the bottom, and, in stopping the course of a small brook which glided smoothly round the foot of the eminence, gave by its opposition a feeble voice of murmur to the placid and elsewhere silent streamlet."

Forest scenery never looks so beautiful as in Autumn ; and at no period of this season can it be seen to better advantage than between the shutting in of September and the opening of October. It is then that Nature seems to have exhausted all the fantastic colours of her palette, and to have scattered her richest red, brown, yellow, and purple upon the foliage. Every gust of wind that now blows, brings down thousands of golden-coloured acorns, that come pattering like little feet among the fallen leaves, leaving empty their smooth, round, hollow cups, from which the old poets in their fables framed the drinking vessels of the fairies. We need not wander further than the New Forest to witness one of those scenes where we can see realized the picture of Gurth, the swineherd, tending his noisy and grunting charge, as they feed upon the fattening acorns. It is only amid forest scenery that hogs have a poetical appearance ; there is then a clear, silvery look about their bristly hides, which is beautifully brought out by the green of the underwood, and softened by the shadows of the overhanging branches. The picture is also more endeared to us through its antiquity ; for, excepting in the change of costume of the swineherd, we know that our old English forests presented just such another scene above a thousand years ago. We find it recorded in the earliest descriptions we possess of the manners and customs of our Saxon forefathers. In Doomsday Book it is frequently mentioned ; and, among the old forest laws, we find the seasons of mast, and pannage, and fence-month, regulated by regarders, verdurers, agistors, and all those grim guardians of the green wood, who knew every foot of the forest boundaries,—who were ever wandering about with bolt and bow in hand, ready to shoot a shaft at either dog or man, if they were found trespassing upon the Royal chace.

Those who live on the borders of the forest have the privilege of feeding their hogs upon acorns or beech-mast throughout the month of October, and they are still intrusted to the care of a swineherd as they were in the olden time. The modern Gurth, however, first sets out to reconnoitre the forest ; and, having found a shady and favourable spot, where acorns or beech-mast

are abundant, and water is near at hand, he next commences erecting a habitation for the reception of his ravenous herd. Having selected some huge, gigantic oak, he encloses a large space around it with a wattled fence, makes a warm bed inside of fern, weeds, and withered forest grass, then covers it over with branches and entangling underwood. After this is completed, he collects his herd amongst the neighbouring foresters, who generally pay a shilling a head for all they intrust to his care; and, driving them where there is a plentiful supply of food, he allows them to eat their fill, and after this urges them on to the clear water-course, when, having drunk, he forces them back to the large sty he has erected, and leaves them, in all their swinish ease, to repose until the following morning. After a day or two they require but little looking after; for, although they will wander away two or three miles into the depths of the forest, and be divided into numerous parties, yet each division of the herd has its leader, generally some large boar, who is sure to

return at nightfall, trudging before his followers to the accustomed resting-place, beneath the huge, broad-branching oak. By the end of the month the whole herd is in such excellent condition that but little food is required for fattening them before they are slaughtered.

One of the most beautiful pictures in Bloomfield's "Farmer's Boy" is a description of swine coming to drink at the forest-pool, and startling the wild duck from her lonely haunt, who, in

her turn, alarms the whole herd by the noise she makes with her wings as she rises, when

> "With bristles raised, the sudden noise they hear,
> And ludicrously wild, and wing'd with fear,
> The herd decamp with more than swinish speed,
> And, snorting, dash through sedge, and rush, and reed.
> Through tangling thickets headlong on they go,
> Then stop and listen for their fancied foe:
> The hindmost still the growing panic spreads—
> Repeated fright the first alarm succeeds."

The very rustling of the many-coloured leaves is sufficient to start them off again, and no spot would be more likely to contain such millions of these fallen "beauties of Summer" than one of these old forests:—

> Leaves of all hues, red, green, and brown,
> Ruins of summer bowers
> A thousand times more beautiful
> Than all her fairest flowers.

In parks, and on rich estates, the owners have had trees planted so as to receive all the rich colouring of the forests in Autumn, when the trees are, as it were, kindled with fire. The attempt has been vain; for what Nature seems to do by accident she will not accomplish at the bidding of Art; she only throws her rich colours together to please her own wild fancy, and man can no more copy them than he can give a truthful painting of a sunset on the sea, pavilioned in golden clouds which are changing every instant.

Take Sherwood Forest in Autumn, which I have before alluded to, and then you will see it clothed in all the richer hues of romance. No palace in a fairy-tale was ever painted in such gaudy colours as the trees then assume. Even Gilpin, who had not much poetical fire in his nature, warmed up when he saw it at this season of the year. He begins coldly enough by telling us what a landscape-gardener would think of its mingled pasture-tracts and wooded nooks, interspersed here and there with fields under cultivation; but he warms as he proceeds, and says, "These intermingled scenes are again divided from others

of the same kind by wild heaths, which are sometimes skirted by the horizon, at others with wood; and this intermixture of wood and pasturage, with large separations of heath, gives a variety to many tracts of Sherwood Forest which could not be expected in a boundless continuance of woody scenery alone. The forest-heath, too, becomes a most interesting scene to the admirer of Nature when bounded, as it generally is in this forest, by woods in various directions, and interspersed here and there with planted clumps, which almost imperceptibly unite its woody boundaries with the wide foreground of heath and gravel.

"A very pleasing contrast may be discovered in the broad masses of colour in the wild extent of heath, and the various portions of gravelly surface, broken as they often are by the rude forest-tracks, or dotted in deeper shades with patches of furze, fern, or other wild plants, which stain it with every shade of green, or enliven it with the yellow furze-blossoms. In some places, too, the most pleasing ideas of animated Nature break in upon the scene from the woodman's cottage, or groups of cattle, or herds of deer; and when these circumstances come in unexpectedly, and happily unite with the time of day, or with the general expression given to the scene by the state of the atmosphere, it does not require much taste to perceive that, to a picturesque eye, the wild heath may become one of the most interesting scenes of the forest. To this must be added the incidental appearance of smoke, either from the low-roofed cottage, or from the frequent practice of burning gorse or fern for agricultural purposes, which is always attended with peculiar beauty in woodland scenery. In the latter case its effect is always striking, for then we see it in large masses spreading in the forest-glades, and forming a soft background to the trees which intercept it; and, as this process takes place in Autumn, it contrasts more happily their variegated foliage, and adds a greater charm to the landscape."

Smoke adds great beauty to forest scenery, when it rises from some picturesque spot, which is open in the centre but hemmed in with a background of trees, or when seen rising at the end of

a long avenue of chestnuts, such as may be seen no farther off than Greenwich Park, and most of which were planted by Evelyn. Nor do we know any other spot within fifty miles of London where so many splendid chestnuts can be found within the same compass of ground. And there are trees, it must be borne in

mind, in what is called the "Wilderness,"—a secluded portion of the park,—which were no doubt standing when Blackheath, and miles beyond Eltham, was all forest-land.

Grand must have been the stag-hunts that took place in these great old forests in the grey centuries that have departed. We have but very meagre descriptions of them left behind; yet by fishing out a morsel here and there, we are enabled to complete the picture.

Vert and venison were at that time guarded by grim and savage laws, which condemned a man to suffer death if he killed a deer within the forbidden forest boundaries. The stag was hunted in those days with kingly pomp and grandeur, through forests that darkened many a long league of land, and such as will never wave over green England again. Never more will there be such a mustering of verdurers, regarders, agistors, woodwards, forest-keepers, and retainers of every degree, as then assembled amid the sound of horns, the baying of hounds, and the tramp and neighing of horses, mounted by monarch, and baron bold, and maiden fair, whose long locks streamed out on the morning breeze, or, while she bent her neck to speak to some unmounted knight beside her, mingled their silkiness for a moment with the mane of her palfrey.

Sometimes the hunters rode through lonely glens, where all was silence, saving the brawling of the brook—where the echoes were never broken by human voice, except when the antlered monarch of the forest led the hunters into these solitudes. For weary miles a deep twilight ever reigned at noonday in this dreamy land of trees, where boughs, the growth of many a century, overhung the underwood, in which the hind concealed her young until they were strong enough to trot by her side over the velvet sward, under the waving woodbines, and the tall spotted foxgloves, and the broad, fan-like leaves of the bracken.

It is now the morning of the chase; and we will forget the present day of railroads and steamboats, and place ourselves amongst the spectators who five hundred years ago assembled to witness the departure of the hunters. For miles around the forest men are stationed, at given distances, to drive back the deer that may attempt to escape; others are holding huge stag-hounds in strong leashes—hounds gaunt and shaggy, yet swifter of foot than the fallow-deer, and possessing strength enough to pull down the proudest leader of the antlered herd. The horses keep arching their necks, and pawing the ground, and scattering the white foam on the bystanders, while they champ the bit restlessly, and jerk their heads impatiently, as if eager to be "sniffing the wind" afar off. And now the train issues from the

grey postern of the old castle, over which the drooping ivy waves like the green "garland of eternity." Lady's scarf and knightly plume bend in the breeze, as they ride out side by side—forgotten beauty and forgotten bravery, once seen where only the wild wall-flower now waves.

Hark! the horn sounds; the hounds which have lain among the heather spring up; others strain at the leash; the horses become more impatient; hunters follow the foremost hounds into the forest; there is heard a loud crashing of branches; then the horn is again heard. Those three piercing blasts proclaim that the deer is started, and now the whole cavalcade dash into the wide grassy opening that winds for miles into the forest, marked by the wheels of wains and the hoofs of bullocks that have dragged many a stout gigantic tree from the solitude in which it stood for centuries. Fresh from his forest covert bounds the noble stag, looking around a moment in wild amazement; then springing through the underwood, he trots at first leisurely enough along some well-known path; then the baying of the hounds reaches his ear, and through the entangling thicket he thunders, parting the branches as if they were but mist, while they close again behind him with a force strong enough to sweep a lady from her palfrey. By the forest-brook, which has so often reflected his branching head, he now hurries along; the baying of the hounds draws nearer; he has already run miles, his mouth is now dry, his tongue hangs out, his horns fall back on his neck, and his eyes seem only to look behind, as if measuring the distance between him and his pursuers, and so, panting heavily, he passes along, and at last dashes across the stream. He shakes his antlered head, pauses again for the twentieth part of a second; and, while the wet drops which he scatters around fall on the brown fern and the gorse, and the bramble black with berries, and the briar red with hips, and the wild-rose, away he goes again into a still denser thicket, making the branches rattle again as he cleaves them asunder. A minute after, and the foremost hounds come up: for a moment they are at fault—they have lost the scent—in another second the slot is found; they dash through the stream, and the forest

again rings with their deep-mouthed clamour. Far behind come the horsemen, through openings of the wood, the bells of their bridles jingling with a pleasant sound, the horses stepping almost noiselessly on the forest turf, as they hurry along in their headlong course. Where the shadow of the broad oak falls, onward plunges the deer; he passes like a phantom through the sunshine between the trees. Onward come the hounds in pursuit; then the close branches shut out the scene, and all you hear are the echoes and the faint tramp of the last of the cavalcade. Later in the day, and far beyond the forest, you again see the poor wearied stag, dragging his limbs heavily along, while only two or three of the stauncher hounds have been able to follow him, with one lonely hunter, whose jaded steed looks as if it would founder if urged on another step: the rest who followed have long ago drawn in their rein, and abandoned the chase. You look behind, and there see a noble hound panting on the ground, a rider standing beside his fallen horse; further on, a steed that has dropped down dead; nor have the hounds which have now reached the stag strength to pull him down, but, as they tug at his throat and haunches on the spot where he fell through sheer exhaustion, they are compelled to pause every moment to recover breath. See, the hunter alights, and with his knife ends the miseries of the poor stag.

These old forests were also infested with wolves, and continued to be up to a period that few credit, so near does it tread upon the centuries of our own time. The last wolf seen wild in Britain was killed about two hundred and seventy years ago, at Lochaber, in Scotland. A few centuries back Yorkshire was so overrun with wolves, that places for shelter in case of attack were erected on the wolds and other wild and lonely parts of this extensive county; and parish-books yet exist, of a comparatively modern date, which show the sums paid to different individuals for destroying wolves. In those days they bred on the wolds and "caves," and found shelter in the vast forests which spread over England; and from these retreats the wolves issued forth at night, and devoured numbers of sheep.

In an old work written by William Barclay, we find the

following description of a royal hunting with which the Earl of Athol treated Queen Mary. "In the year 1563," says the writer, "the Earl of Athol, a prince of the blood royal, had, with much trouble and vast expense, a hunting-match for the entertainment of our most illustrious and most gracious queen: our people call this a royal hunting. I was then a young man, and was present on that occasion. Two thousand Highlanders, or wild Scotch, as you call them here, were employed to drive to the hunting-ground all the deer from the woods and hills of Athol, Badenoch, Marr, Moray, and the counties about. As these Highlanders use a light dress and are very swift of foot, they went up and down so nimbly, that in less than two months they brought together two thousand red deer, besides roes and fallow deer. The queen, the great men, and a number of others, were in a glen, when all these deer were brought before them. Believe me, the whole body moved forward in something like battle order. This sight still strikes me, and ever will strike me, for they had a leader whom they followed close wherever he moved. This leader was a very fine stag, with a very fine head. This sight delighted the queen very much, but she soon had cause to fear, upon the earl's (who had been from his early days accustomed to such sights) addressing her thus: 'Do you observe that stag who is foremost of the herd? there is danger from that stag; for if either fear or rage should force him from the ridge of that hill, let every one look to himself, for none of us will be out of the way of harm; for the rest will follow this one, and having thrown us under foot, they will open a passage to this hill behind us.' What happened a moment after confirmed this opinion; for the queen ordered one of the best dogs to be let loose on one of the deer: this the dog pursues; the leading stag was frighted, he flies by the same way he had come there; the rest rush after him, and break out where the thickest body of the Highlanders was; they had nothing for it but to throw themselves flat on the heath, and allow the deer to pass over them. It was told the queen that several of the Highlanders had been wounded, and that two or three had been killed outright; and the whole body had got off, had not the Highlanders, by their skill in hunting,

fallen upon a stratagem to cut off the rear from the main body. It was of those that had been separated, that the queen's dogs and those of the nobility made slaughter. There were killed that day three hundred and sixty deer, with five wolves, and some roes."

The eye of the stag is peculiarly beautiful, soft, and sparkling; in him the senses of hearing, smelling, and seeing exist in a degree of acuteness perfectly wonderful. When listening. he raises his head, erects his ears, and catches up every noise, how-

ever distant. When he approaches a thicket, he stops to look around him on all sides, and attentively surveys every object near him: if the cunning animal perceives nothing to alarm him, he moves slowly forward; but on the least appearance of danger, he flies off with the rapidity of the wind. He listens with great tranquillity and delight to the sound of the shepherd's pipe, which is sometimes made use of to allure him to his destruction. If he be called to with a loud voice, or a loud whistle, as he is going carelessly through the forest, he will stop and look round

for a little time. This we can answer for on our own experience, and, we believe, is often a means employed to insure to the marksman a more steady shot.

The stag is nice in the choice of his pasture, eats slowly, and when his stomach is full he lies down to chew the cud at leisure. The great length of his neck renders this a tedious operation, and one which is not effected without great straining. Indeed, the grass is returned from the first stomach, through the narrow passage of his long neck, with a kind of hiccup, which continues during the whole time he is engaged in ruminating. The older the stag grows, the stronger his voice becomes and the more it quivers: in the rutting season it is even terrible. We ourselves remember to have heard the stags of Braemar roaring to one another, whilst we were groping our way down from Ben Mach Dhuie, in a dark night; and although this was in Autumn, we thought the sound more allied to the roaring of wild beasts of prey, than to the voice of any of our herbivorous animals. The note of the hind is not so loud; indeed, it is seldom heard but when excited by apprehension for herself or her young. The stag was supposed to be extremely long-lived; but more recent observations have settled the extreme duration of his existence as being from thirty-five to forty years.

The stag is capable of making a very bold defence. William, Duke of Cumberland, caused a tiger and a stag to be inclosed in the same area; and the stag made so bold a defence, that the tiger was obliged to give up the contest. But this is not wonderful, as we have heard of a jackass beating off a tiger with his heels.

It is a strange mistake that Bewick and some other English zoologists fall into, in saying that the flesh of the stag is "poor and ill-flavoured." These gentlemen, by saying so, only prove that they have never had the good fortune to eat a bit of red deer venison in good season, such as used to be shot by the late Duke of Athol. Certainly, no carrion can be worse than red deer venison when it is out of season; but when the animal is killed in proper season, and in good plight, his flesh is as far superior to that of park venison as can possibly be conceived. The fat is then

several inches thick, and the flavour of both that and of the lean is quite enough to endanger the life of any alderman who may be seated before it.

The stag, though left free to wander whithersoever it pleases in the forest, but rarely goes far from the walk where it was bred; and the keeper, who is careful that his deer does not go beyond these limits, will encourage their fondness for these homely haunts, by feeding them, in winter, with holly and other plants, which

they are fond of, and browsing them in summer with the sprays of trees, which he will pull down for them. When he distributes their food he makes a hallooing noise to call them together; and in calm evenings, if you frequent any part of the forest near a lodge, you will hear this hallooing noise resounding

through the woods ; and if you are not apprised of it, you will be apt to wonder each evening at its regular recurrence.

The stag generally feeds in the night, or very early in the morning, and retires in the day to the shelter of the forest. Their morning retreat is thus beautifully described :—

> "The day pours in apace,
> And opens all the lawny prospect wide ;
> The hazy woods, the mountain's misty top,
> Swell on the sight ; while o'er the forest glade
> The wild deer trip and, often turning, gaze
> At early passengers."

Mr. Pennant tells us, that in Germany the peasants frequently watch their corn the whole night, to preserve it from the depredations of deer ; and the same sharp look-out is still kept by the farmers on the borders of the New Forest, who are equally subject to their depredations, and are obliged, when the neighbouring deer make a haunt of their corn-lands, to burn fires all night, to keep them off. It is well known among foresters, that deer will not approach disagreeable smells ; therefore, the farmers smear the ropes with tar which they set up as fences, and throw fetid substance into the fires, to disseminate an unpleasant odour.

Gilpin, in his "Forest Scenery," further says, "There is no species of landscape which so universally captivates mankind as forest scenery ; and our prepossession in favour of it appears in nothing more than in this,—that the inhabitants of bleak countries totally destitute of wood are generally considered, from the natural feelings of mankind, as the objects of pity."

That man was originally a forest animal, appears from every page of his early history. Trace the first accounts of any people, and you will find them the inhabitants of woods, if woods were to be found in the countries in which they lived ; caves, thickets, and trunks of trees were their retreats, and acorns their food, with such beasts as they took in hunting, which afforded them only a precarious supply.

While man continued thus an inmate of the forest, it is possible he might have sagacity to build himself a hut of boughs, which he might cover with clods ; and yet it is more probable, that while he continued the mere child of Nature, he was contented

with the simple shelter which Virgil supposes his common mother furnished—"the embowering thicket, or the hollow trunk," as Summer or Winter led him to prefer an open or a closer cover. Strabo speaks of certain Asiatics, even so late as the times of Pompey the Great, who harboured, like birds, in the tops of trees; and I think the savages about Botany Bay are not represented by our late discoverers in a much more improved condition.

Man in his solitary state (for scarcity of food forbade any enlarged ideas of society) waged but unequal war with his brother savages the brutes. Most of them outstripped him in speed, many of them contended with him in strength, and some nearly equalled him in sagacity.

The human savage, thus finding himself hard put to it even to defend his own, might look round for assistance. The dog,

whose friendly manners might solicit his acquaintance, was probably one of the first associates in those countries where dogs were to be found. This union made a powerful party in the forest. The great object of it, however, was rather food than conquest. The dog and his master were both carnivorous animals; and they soon began to gratify their appetites at the expense of their fellow-brutes. The one conducting and the other executing the plan, few creatures could oppose them.

We do not know what dogs were used by our old hunters, though mention is made of the bloodhound in the most ancient works we possess that treat of the chase.

But man from the beginning was an ambitious animal. Having gratified his appetite, he aspired after dominion. For this purpose it was necessary for him to procure a better ally than that he had chosen. He had yet but little connexion with his fellow. To join now and then in a hunting-party was all the intercourse he knew. It was little more than such a league as is found among wolves, jackals, and other animals that hunt in packs. Ideas of society, however, by degrees took place. The dawnings of social compact appeared. Man now threw off the brute, and thought it good to leave his scattered tenements, and to assemble in hordes. The rudiments of law were traced, and some rude sketch of subordination. In earnest, he now began to show his dominion. By fellowship he had increased his strength. The horse, the bullock, and other animals were reclaimed from the forest,—some for social assistance, and others for a less precarious supply of food; while the shaggy tenants of the forest, which were hostile to his plans, began everywhere to give way,—prowling only by night, and skulking by day in such deep recesses as might best secure them from the formidable association which had taken place.

But still his native forest was man's delight. Here, in some opening surrounded with woods, the horde first settled. Here the first attempts of architecture were made; the kraal was laid out by rule and line, and the first draughts of regular defence were imagined. Cæsar, with all his boasted conquests, found the Gauls, the Britons, and the Germans, scarce emerging from this state of barbarism. His "Commentaries" everywhere show them to have been forest people, retreating before him into their fastnesses, and impeding his march by felling timber in his way. The Britons, he expressly tells us, gave the name of a town to part of a forest, which they had fortified with a rampart and a ditch.

But Cæsar saw the British town only in time of war. Strabo gives us a picture of one in time of peace, and says, "Forests

were the only towns in use among them ; which were formed by cutting down a large circle of wood, and erecting huts within it, and sheds for cattle." The same author, afterwards describing a town of this kind, shows more exactly the mode of fortifying it. It was the practice, he tells us, to intermix and weave together the branches of thorny trees, and strengthen them with stakes.

As the arts of civilisation increased, man began to feel that the forest could not afford him all the convenience he wished. Wants multiplied upon him, which he could not indulge amidst its recesses. He chose fertile situations for tillage, the neighbourhood of rivers for mills and manufactories, and descended to the sea coast for commerce, which he extended to the most distant parts.

In the course of time man began to find the forest in his way, it occupied the ground fit for his plough, and the pasturage of his cattle, and also afforded shelter for his enemies. After this discovery the fable was realized; man begged of the forest a handle for his hatchet, and when he had obtained the boon, he used it in felling the forest.

And all around these ancient forests, hawking was followed as well as hunting, and was as popular a sport in the olden time. There is many an old portrait still extant, where the lady fair is pictured holding a falcon on her gloved hand. Hawks were taken to the field or forest hooded, on a frame, which was carried by one of the falconers, and very often a favourite hawk was borne thither perched on the hand of its pretty mistress. The legs of the hawks were also ornamented with silver bells, but these were not worn when the bird was turned loose to fly at the quarry. Hawking was followed both on foot and on horseback. When on foot, he who followed it carried a stout pole, by the aid of which he leaped the water-courses and ditches. It was while hawking on foot that Henry VIII. got a good ducking: pity he was not drowned, for at that period his name was not stained with blood; but Heaven willed it otherwise.

The laws for the protection of hawks were almost as severe as those passed to preserve vert and venison (forest-trees and deer). Only the nobles and persons of wealth were permitted to keep hawks. If a hawk was lost, he who found it was compelled to give notice to the sheriff, under a heavy fine, when a proclamation was issued for miles around, and a description given of the hawk. If the finder concealed the bird, he had to give it up and pay its full value, or suffer two years' imprisonment; the value was no trifling matter in those days, as a good hawk was sometimes sold for one hundred pounds, which was worth about three hundred at the present value of money. Anyone taking away the eggs of the hawk was imprisoned twelve months and a day. Kings sent choice hawks to one another as presents, and even grave judges were not proof against the bribe of a falcon. One of our kings was so attached to hawking, that he could not invade a foreign country without being attended

by his falconers. In France, our Edward III. was followed by thirty mounted falconers. Mews were the names of the places in which hawks were formerly kept, and many stables still bear the name.

The peregrine falcon appears to have been held in the highest estimation by our ancestors, as he was a bold, daring bird, possessing great courage, and never hesitated to pounce upon any quarry which he met in his high airy domain; he, however, never prolonged the sufferings of his victim, but once having seized his prey plunged his piercing bill into its vitals, and killed it in an instant. The grasp of his formidable talons was like that of a vice, and when once the prey was struck there was no escaping. The gerfalcon was celebrated for

attacking larger game, such as herons, cranes, bittern, and other birds that haunt the waters. His plan of attack was by outsoaring his prey, and when he had gained a sufficient altitude falling upon it like a thunderbolt. I do not know who is the author of the following passage, but it is one of

the most graphic descriptions of hawking I have ever met with, and will convey to my readers a better picture of this all but obsolete sport than I am able to draw. I, therefore, give it entire. "When I have, in my youthful days, been as glad as ever I was to come from school to see a little martin, in the dead time of the year, make her way through the midst of a multitude of foul-mouthed ravenous crows and kites, which pursued her with more hideous cries and clamours than did Coil the dog and Malkin the maid, like the fox in the apologue,

> 'When the geese for fear flew over the trees,
> And out of their hives came the swarms of bees,'—CHAUCER.

and, maugre (in spite of) all their opposition, pulled down her prey bigger than herself, being mounted aloft, steeple-high, down to the ground. To hear one relate how he went forth in a clear, calm, and sunshiny evening, about an hour before the sun did usually mask himself, unto the river, where, finding a mallard, he whistled off his falcon, and how she flew from him, as if she would never have turned her head again, yet presently, upon a shout, came in; how then, by little and little, by flying about and about, she mounted so high, until she had lessened herself, to the view of the beholder, to the shape of a pigeon or a partridge, and made the height of the moon the place of her flight; how, presently, upon the landing of the fowl, she came down like a stone and renewed it, and suddenly got up again; and suddenly, upon a second landing, came down again, and, missing of it in the down-come, recovered it, beyond expectation, to the admiration of the beholder. To hear him tell how he went forth to the woody fields and pastures to fly the cock, where having, by the little white feather in his tail, discovered him in a brake, he cast off a tassel-gentle (a hawk), and how he never ceased in his circular motion until he had recovered his place; how, suddenly, upon the flushing of the cock, he came down, and, missing it in the down-come, what working there was on both sides. How the cock mounted as if he would have pierced the skies; how the hawk flew a contrary way until he made the wind his friend; how, then,

by degrees, he got up, yet never offered to come in until he had got the advantage of the higher ground; how, then, he made in; what speed the cock made to save himself, and what hasty

pursuit the hawk made; and how, after two long miles' flight killed it, yet in killing of it killed himself. These discourses

I love to hear, and can well be content to be an eye-witness of the sport when my occasions will permit." The whole extract might rank side by side with the finest descriptions of Izaak Walton, and we regret that we cannot give our readers the name of its old author, neither do we know at this moment where we first found the passage, although we have some dim recollection that it was while hunting for facts for our "Historical Romances," in the British Museum, several years ago.

The hobby is one of the smallest species of falcon, and was used for hawking at such birds as larks; and so daring is this little hawk (which is still very common in England), that it has been known to dash in at an open window, at a bird in a cage, when several persons have been in the room. In fowling, this bird was frequently thrown up to keep the birds cowering upon the ground while the net was thrown over them.

The kestrel is one of the most beautiful of the falcon tribe; it may still often be seen hovering, apparently motionless, in the air, until it discovers its prey, when down it drops like a stone: its vision must be very powerful, when it can see a little bird, or a mouse, from such an altitude. A kite or glede will pounce upon a young hare or rabbit; it has been known to carry off a chicken from the threshold of a cottage, when the owner has been standing within arm's length. Its outspread wings have measured six feet from tip to tip.

Buffon says, "One cannot but admire the manner of its flight; the long and narrow wings seem immovable; it is his tail that seems to direct all his evolutions, and he moves it continually; he rises without effort, comes down as if he were sliding along an inclined plane—and seems rather to swim than fly; he darts forward, slackens his speed, stops, and remains suspended or fixed in the same place for whole hours, without exhibiting the smallest motion of his wings." It is on record, that in the time of Henry VIII. kites were often seen in the streets of London gathering up the offal which the inhabitants threw out; nor is this to be wondered at, when we remember that the country around London was wild and open for miles. We have frequently seen the kite hovering above a country town.

The noblest quarry flown at in ancient times appears to have been the heron, as he showed the best sport by attempting to outsoar the hawk. It is said that when the hawk descended on its prey, the heron would sometimes turn suddenly round, and receive its enemy on its sharp bill, which, through the velocity of the descent, went, at times, clean through the body of the falcon. This, however, appears to be doubtful, although not impossible. Hawks must have been of great use before the invention of gunpowder, for the fowler's instruments underwent but little improvement during the lapse of centuries.

But we must now bid adieu to the forest and its scenery, for gloomy shadows begin to gather about the landscapes of Autumn, and as we pace the silent harvest-fields and think of the joyous, healthy life and stir so lately seen there, we recall some deserted banquet-hall, through which we walked, sorrowful and full of thought, on the morning after the feast. The desolate corn-field is a melancholy picture on a rainy day at the close of the Autumn, with the swine and geese grunting, rooting, and gabbling among the rotting stubble. The silvery laugh of the rustic maiden while reaping or gleaning, when love

and labour went hand in hand, is gone. The creaking waggon and jingling harness are heard no more, and only a broken bottle or some unsightly fragment is now found, where but a few weeks ago the last sheaf was standing, decorated with ribbons and flowers. The straggling ears of corn, which the birds have emptied, still hang withering on the hedges, by which they were torn off as the heavy loads went rocking through the fields and lanes, and they alone tell you that the last load was long since garnered, and the harvest feast over and gone.

The rain patters on the hips and haws and poisonous berries of the nightshade, and instead of beautiful wild flowers, we now see only the dry, brown, seed-vessels, that drop their withered heads and seem waiting mournfully for the Autumn winds to blow them abroad, the falling leaves to bury them, and the dull, dead-sounding rain to beat upon their graves. On some low, damp, swampy waste, you see a few bean-sheaves, which no sun could ever reach to ripen, and which have been rained and blown upon night after night, and day after day, until they have become so mouldy and rotten, that even the hungry birds fly over them without alighting. The poor proprietor sits shivering with the ague in his decaying and tumble-down tenement, looking with bleared eyes, through the smoke which obscures the broken window, upon the desolate picture we have painted.

CLOSE OF AUTUMN.

EFFECTS OF AUTUMN—GARDENS—ROADS—FLOWERS—HOPS—HIBERNATION OF ANIMALS—FLOODS—MIRROR OF THE MONTHS—FUNGI—METEORS—WATERFALLS—SPIDER-WEBS—DECAY OF LEAVES—WINDS—END OF AUTUMN.

AUTUMN, with Winter now treading upon her heels, and warning her to depart, is sending out his scouts armed with keen frosts to cut away the few last flowers that remain, so that Winter may have more room to spread his snow, and blow abroad his arrowy sleet. There is a sound of loud lament in the sobbing woods, and a deep complaining of streams between the over-

brimming banks; a rattling of branches and clashing together of great grey boughs, that groan again in their mighty agony, as the storm tries in vain to tear them from their gnarled and knotty stems, while the streams foam and dash and hurry on in their headlong course, as if they had now no cause to linger—no flowers to mirror back, no green shady sprays to cover them—but were eager to reach their journey's end, and empty themselves into river or sea, to escape from the blinding rain that is ever coming down heavily. The gardens have a desolate and dreary appearance; and if a flower still lingers behind, it looks like a mourner bending over a grave, and envying the dead that lie below: it seems lost in the world without its companions, and you are glad when it is gone.

November is the pioneer of Winter: he marches foremost, and gathers all the decayed leaves into dark hollows and dreary places, where they lie to be blown and snown upon, until the work of decay and death is completed. The song-birds that gladdened our woods and hills are now far away over the sea; the twitter of the swallows no longer falls upon the ear between the showers, as it did in Spring; nor is there even the murmuring of a bee to vary the monotonous moaning of the wind, and the dull dead plashing of the rain. The cattle stand disconsolate beside the leafless hedges, looking wistfully towards the well-stored farm-yard, as if wondering why they are kept so long from the snug, warm, and well-filled stall. The woodman drags his way wearily towards the forest, trying in vain to whistle the cheerful tunes which seemed to shorten his journey in Spring, and glad when the short day has drawn to a close. There is a ragged and vagrant look about the clouds, and they seem to wander homeless about the sky, as if they had no resting-place, but were driven hither and thither at the will of that harsh overseer the wind.

All around tells us that Autumn is drawing to a close—that we are rapidly approaching the domains of Winter; and that the cheerful faggot and the clean-swept hearth will have greater charms for us during the long dark evenings than we can find anywhere now in the out-of-door world, for there the poor robin

alone sings his solitary song over the skeleton leaves, that wander about like fairy phantoms, seeking in vain for a resting-place. The wind and the rain are abroad, careering across the gloomy hill-tops, and chasing each other over the damp marshes ; there is a howling and rattling noise heard throughout the long black nights, and the wind seems calling aloud to the rain, as it taps its liquid fingers upon our casements. Our gardens seem mourning over the departure of Summer ; the footmarks of desolation are printed upon our parterres, and the hand of death has smitten both flower and stem with decay ; dead leaves are thickly piled in moist masses upon our walks, and cling with a tenacious clamminess to our feet. The ethereal hues of the flower-bells, that blazed in azure, crimson, and gold, and threw their rich fragrance upon the wide air, have vanished, like a beautiful rainbow that leaves in its place a sorrowful gloominess. The little brooks no longer murmur melodiously under the drooping greenery of reflected boughs, but foam and boil in their increasing might, as if exulting in their strength, and rolling proudly over the yielding banks, and seeming to glory in their headlong course, like a wild horse that has shaken off his trammels and despises the puny arm of his rider. In the powerful language of the Scripture, we have now "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, even very dark, and no brightness in it, for the land is darkened, and when we wait for light, there cometh a deep darkness."

The roads are now heavy, and the nights dark, and the old village-carrier can no longer see his favourite landmark, the square church-tower, that ever before seemed to cheer him as it came and went at each well-known turning of the road, as if to tell him that the kettle was singing and the fire burning brightly in his peaceful cottage that stood sheltered among the churchyard trees. His grey-tilted cart and snail-paced horse, seen creeping on a foggy November day along the road, served to remind us that there was a time when the slow pack-horse and the heavy rumbling wain, often drawn by oxen, were the only modes of conveyance—the one with its packs and jingling bells, or wicker panniers, then called "dorsers" (and we have still in

London the sign of the "Horse and Dorsers"), the other heavy and cumbrous, with wheels that moved on wooden axles; and when the miry and rutted roads are taken into consideration, our slow-paced carriers' carts are, comparatively speaking, four-horse coaches to the speed of travelling in those old primitive times. Then there were no lamps to light the streets on the dark November nights, but only an open cresset, not unlike a

chafing-dish, stuck on a pole here and there, and which, being open, was soon blown out on a windy night. And, saving the drowsy voice of the feeble old bellman, heard at intervals as he went his rounds, and the occasional flicker of his horn-lantern on the unpaved streets, the old towns would lie asleep in dreary darkness and unbroken silence. When we glance at the past, then turn to the England of the present day, and think seriously of the changes which have taken place, even within the last half-century only, they are a thousand times more marvellous than the fabulous wonders wrought by the magicians in the story-

books we perused in our boyish days, and such reflections almost make even the close of Autumn cheerful.

The dahlias are by this time gone, and look, after the first frosty night, as if they had been immersed in boiling water, so black and flabby is the foliage: there are only the chrysanthemums left standing out of doors that have at all a flowery look, with perhaps a Michaelmas daisy or two, that has lingered beyond its time. A few of the stocks that were backward during the summer may still be found in bloom, but with such a dashed and draggled look, through one colour running into the other, that you would almost as soon see the ground covered with ever-flowering groundsel as such a tattered display as the stocks make. French and African marigolds also seem endued with almost endless life, and manage to show a golden head here and there among the chrysanthemums, the shelter of which has helped to preserve them; and sometimes that beautiful ornament of Spring, the lupin, will show its bloom again, even at the very close of Autumn. Amongst shrubs, the arbutus looks boldly out, while the scarlet foliage of the Virginian creeper never looks so beautiful as now, supposing no very severe frosts have as yet set in.

But though it is late, and almost beyond the time, we must not wholly omit hop-picking, the very last in-gathering of Autumn. The cottages in the neighbourhood of the hop-gardens are deserted during the day, for the good housewife and her numerous family are transferred to the hop-ground, where all assist in the easy task of plucking the hops from the bines to help to fill the bushel. Even the infant and its rustic cradle are carried to the field; and such is the degree of drowsiness produced by the powerful but harmless odour of the hops, that the little innocents sleep nearly the whole day amid the hum and bustle of the scene, without requiring either much trouble or care.

There is no scene which so closely resembles vine-gathering in the sunny land of Italy as our English hop-season. Here we have girls as lovely, their long ringlets floating among the drooping hops, and their bare arms glancing between the

clusters, while laughter echoes far around. And what a forest-garden appears the hop-ground! a fairy wood fraught with fragrance! What could excel a garden of woodbines planted in the manner of hops? no thorns, no briars, nothing but long trails of perfume, which would make the very wind linger to woo so sweet a spot, and draw together the melody of a thousand birds! A stream might murmur through it, making drowsy music: it would then be a place fit for the assemblage of gods; rivalling even the golden fields of Enna, where Proserpine wandered bewildered with sweet odours, and enchanted with the variegated bloom of flowers.

There is something, too, so green and clean about a hop-plantation, and such a soothing aroma arises from the perfume of the bine, that it seems like the last sweet smell Summer has left behind. Nor can anything be more graceful than the drooping vine-shaped leaves, and the golden cones, that have twined in all kinds of fantastic shapes around the tapering poles. What picturesque groups do we see at work! What a gipsy-like encampment has every little family formed! While picking, washing, cooking, and nursing all go on together in harmony at the same time. And a pretty picture did we once see of an innocent child, asleep in its little crib, while on its rounded face the shadows of the hop-leaves flickered and played in the trembling sunbeams—

> Like the last smile of Autumn,
> Beaming above the yellow woods.

Autumn is a busy time with many animals as well as with man. The squirrel and several kinds of mice store up provision against winter; for although they hibernate a great portion of that season, yet a mild, warm atmosphere often awakes them, when they have recourse to the larder, then turn round, and sleep again. Mr. Couch, in his "Animal Instinct," says, "Long before the period of hibernation, and while the degree of temperature, and the abundance of subsistence, occupation, and amusement, one would suppose, would postpone the anticipation of such a state, creatures ordinarily subject to it are found entering upon a series of labours which, to the eye of reason, are as

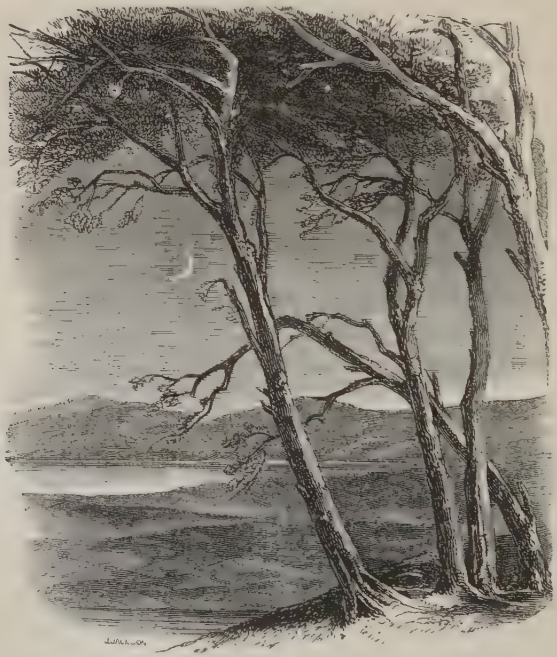
clearly indications of prospective intention as the building of a nest for incubation, or the storing of food for a time of scarcity. In some parts of the Russian dominions, as early as the month of August, while summer is in its glory, and everything inviting to enjoyment of the present rather than care of the future, the rat-hare sets about collecting the herbs which are to form its winter bed, and spreads them out to dry in the sun. In September these dried vegetables are gathered into heaps, which are sometimes the fruits of the labours of a single individual, and at others the united efforts of a company. The hampster in the Alps, and, in our own country, the dormouse, the shrew, and, in a less degree, the hedgehog, have the same habits; in all their proceedings making a marked distinction between their ordinary summer residences, or the receptacles for their young, and those in which they are to pass the time of insensibility. After accomplishing these preparations, a long time is suffered to pass before these animals finally retire to their winter retreats, and then they wrap themselves up in the accumulated materials with a care and skill that indicate how well they are aware of the danger of exposure. The dormouse and harvest-mouse (whose

Summer nests have been placed on elevated stalks of grass, or in the branches of a furze-bush) now wrap themselves up in a ball, so closely woven together as to admit of being rolled about without disturbing its slumbering inhabitant, and stow themselves away in some crevice or recess among the entangled roots of a tree, beneath the soil." Mr. Bell asserts that the hibernation of the hedgehog "is as complete as that of any animal

inhabiting this country;" he further asserts (and we know no higher authority) that it lays up no provision for winter. On the contrary, although the squirrel sleeps away a great portion of the cold season, it lays up ample stores—not all in one place, but concealing the different stores in the holes of several trees around its haunts. Autumn is, therefore, a busy time with this beautiful and clean little animal. The long tailed field-mouse is a great hoarder of food for winter, which consists of nuts, acorns, corn, and a variety of seeds; and sometimes a pig will come smelling and rooting about, to discover the treasure, and devour it, unless it is washed away by the rain; for frequently during Autumn the heavy rains flood the low countries beside rivers for miles, sometimes breaking through the embankments before any one is prepared for such a disaster, and rushing into the fields where the cattle are still left to pick up what they can.

A strange appearance does a country present thus laid suddenly under water. You see cottages and hayricks half-buried; hedges, whose outline you can only trace by the topmost twigs which rise above the surface; and far out to the foot of the opposite hills, what was but a few days ago a green open landscape, is now, with the exception of a few half-buried objects, one wide watery scene. Footpaths and gates are no longer visible; you can only tell where the broad brown level highway went winding along, by the marks of some particular tree that grew here and there beside it; and where the hay and straw and broken boughs have drifted and lodged against the trees, or the uncovered tops of the higher hedges, where water-rats and water-shrews, and mice of all descriptions, and weazels and ferrets, friends and foes, all huddled together, may be found sheltering, and at peace, amid the terrors created by such a wide-spreading deluge. Here the naturalist may meet with objects which he has hunted for in vain for years; for all that burrows underground conceals itself amid the reed-covered banks, or hides under the thick entangling hedgerows, is now compelled to brave the unwelcome light of day, for everything excepting man possesses the power of swimming for a considerable time; he alone finds it difficult to "keep his head above water."

Travellers take the wrong road; and farmers, who have stayed a little too late at the market-town tavern, get into no end of queer bridle-paths, and all at once find themselves anywhere excepting "at home." Lamps in the streets bewilder one terribly, and it would be difficult to tell of our "whereabout," were it not for the old men, who cough one against the other as they pass, and give us warning that we are near the lane or turning



which they are about to enter. The fogs now close around one like a great coat that has been steeped in the river, seeming to fit all the better because no one can see it, but wrapping us all over in its uncomfortable cold, and we for the twentieth time discover that our own humble hearths are more comfortable than the crowded and fashionable rooms we have just quitted.

The author of the "Mirror of the Months" gives the following beautiful picture of the change the hand of Autumn has by this time made:—"Now the last storm of Autumn, or the first of Winter, call it which you will, has strewed the bosom of the all-receiving earth with the few leaves that were still clinging, though dead, to the already sapless branches; and now all stand bare at once, spreading out their innumerable ramifications against the cold grey moonlight sky, as if sketched there for a study by the pencil of your only successful drawing-mistress, Nature. Of all the numerous changes that are perpetually taking place in the general appearance of rural scenery during the year there is none so striking as this which is attendant on the falling of the leaves; and there is none in which the unpleasing effects so greatly predominate over the pleasing ones. A grove denuded of its late gorgeous attire, and instead of bowing majestically before the winds, standing erect and motionless while they are blowing through it, is 'a sorry sight,' and one upon which we will not dwell. But even this sad consequence of the coming on of Winter—sad in most of its more visible effects—is not entirely without redeeming accompaniments; for in most cases it lays open to our view objects that we are glad to see again, if it be but in virtue of their association with past years; and in many cases it opens vistas into sweet distances that we had almost forgotten, and brings into view objects that we may have been sighing for the sight of all the summer long. Suppose, for example, that the summer view from the windows of a favourite sleeping-room is bounded by a screen of shrubs shelving upward from the turf, and terminating in a little copse of limes, beeches, and sycamores—the prettiest boundary that can greet the morning glance! when the shutters are opened, and the sun slants gaily in at them, as if glad to be again admitted. How pleasant is it,—when, as now, the winds of Autumn have stripped the branches that thus bound our view in,—to spy beyond them, as if through network, the sky-pointing spire of the distant village church rising from behind the old yew-tree that darkens its portal; and the trim parsonage beside it, its ivy-grown windows glittering perhaps in the early sun! Oh, none but those who

will see the good that is in everything know how very few evils there are without some of it attendant on them.

"But though the least pleasant sight connected with the coming on of Winter in this month is to see the leaves, that have so gladdened the groves all the summer long, falling everywhere around us withered and dead,—that sight is accompanied by another which is too often overlooked. Though most of the leaves fall in winter, and the stems and branches which they beautified stand bare, many of them remain all the year round, and look brighter and fresher now than they did in spring, in virtue of the contrasts that are everywhere about them. Indeed, the cultivation of evergreens has become so general with us of late years, that the home inclosures about our country dwellings, from the proudest down to even the poorest, are seldom to be seen without a plentiful supply, which we now in this month begin to observe and acknowledge the value of. It must be a poor plot of garden-ground indeed that does not now boast its clumps of Winter-blowing laurustinus; its trim holly-bushes, bright with their scarlet berries; or its tall spruce-firs, shooting up their pyramids of feathery branches beside the low ivy-grown porch.

"Of this last-named profuse ornamenter of whatever is permitted to afford it support (the ivy), we now, too, everywhere perceive the beautifully picturesque effects; though there is one effect of it also perceived about this time which we cannot persuade ourselves to be reconciled to; we mean where the trunk of a tall tree is bound about with ivy almost to its top, which during the summer has scarcely been distinguished as a separate growth, but which now, when the other leaves are fallen, and the outspread branches stand bare, offers to the eye, not a contrast, but a contradiction.

"But we will not dwell on anything in disfavour of ivy,—which is one of the prime boasts of the village scenery of our island, and which even at this season of the year offers pictures to the eye that cannot be paralleled elsewhere. Perhaps, as a single object of sight, there is nothing which gives so much innocent pleasure to so many persons as an English village church,

when the ivy has held undisputed possession of it for many years, and has hung its fantastic banners all about it. There is a charm about an object of this kind which it is as difficult to resist as to explain the secret of.

"Now, as the branches become bare, another sight presents itself, which, trifling as it is, fixes the attention of all who see it, and causes a sensation equally difficult with the above satisfactorily to explain: we mean the birds'-nests that are seen here and there in the now transparent hedges, bushes, and copses. It is not difficult to conceive why this sight should make the heart of the schoolboy leap with an imaginative joy, as it brings before his eyes visions of five blue eggs lying sweetly beside each other on a bed of moss and feathers, or as many gaping bills lifting themselves up from out of what seems one callow body. But we are, unhappily, not all schoolboys; and it is to be hoped not many of us have been bird-nesting ones. And yet we all look upon this sight with a momentary interest that few other so indifferent objects are capable of exciting. The wise may condescend to explain this interest, if they please, or if they can; but if they do, it will be for their own satisfaction, not ours, who are content to be pleased without insisting on penetrating into the cause of our pleasure.

"Now the felling of wood for the winter store commences; and in a mild, still day, the measured strokes of the woodman's axe, heard far away in the thick forest, bring with their sound an associated feeling, similar to that produced by a wreath of smoke rising from out the same scene: they tell us a tale of

'Uncertain dwellers in the pathless woods.'

"The 'busy flail,' too, which is now in full employment, fills the air about the homestead with a pleasant sound, and invites the passer-by to look in at the great open doors of the barn, and see the wheatstack, reaching to the roof on either hand; the little pyramid of bright grain behind the thrashers; the scattered ears between them, leaping and rustling beneath their fast-falling strokes; and the flail itself flying harmless round the labourers' heads, though seeming to threaten danger at every turn; while

outside, the flock of 'barn-door' poultry ply their ceaseless search for food among the knee-deep straw; and the cattle, all their summer frolics forgotten, stand ruminating beside the half-empty hayrack, or lean with inquiring faces over the gate that looks down into the village, or away towards the distant pastures.

"Of the birds that have hitherto made merry, even at the approach of Winter, now all are silent—all save that one which now earns his title of 'the household bird,' by haunting the thresholds and window-sills, and casting sidelong glances indoors, as if to reconnoitre the position of all within, before the pinching frosts force him to lay aside his fears, and flit in and out silently,

like a winged spirit. All are now silent except him; but he, as he sits on the pointed palings beside the doorway, or on the topmost twig of the little blackthorn that has been left growing in the otherwise closely-clipped hedge, pipes plaintive ditties with a low inward voice,—like that of a love-tainted maiden, as she sits apart from her companions, and sings soft melodies to herself, almost without knowing it.

"Some of the other small birds that winter with us, but have hitherto kept aloof from our dwellings, now approach them, and mope about among the house-sparrows, on the bare branches, wondering what has become of all the leaves, and not knowing one tree from another. Of these, the chief are, the hedge-sparrow, the blue titmouse, and the linnet. These also, together with the goldfinch, thrush, blackbird, and others, may still be seen rifling the hip-and-haw-grown hedges of their scanty fruit.

The pert house-sparrow keeps possession of the garden and court-yard all the winter; and the different species of wagtails may be seen busily haunting the clear cold spring-heads, and wading into the unfrozen water in search of their delicate food, consisting of insects in the aurelia state.

"Now the farmer finishes all his out-of-door work before the

frosts set in, and lays by his implements till the awakening of Spring calls him to his hard labour again; while the sheep, all their other more natural food failing, begin to be penned on patches of the turnip-field, where they first devour the green tops joyfully, and then gradually hollow out the juicy root,—holding it firm with their feet, till nothing is left but the dry brown husk. The herds now stand all day long hanging their disconsolate heads beside the leafless hedges, and waiting as anxiously, but as patiently too, to be called home to the hay-fed stall, as they do in Summer to be driven afield. The cold rains come deluging down, till the drenched ground, the dripping trees, the pouring eaves, and the torn ragged-skirted clouds, seemingly dragged downward slantwise by the threads of dusky rain that descend from them, are all mingled together in one blind confusion; while the few cattle that are left in the open pastures, forgetful of their till now interminable business of feeding, turn their backs upon the besieging storm, and hanging down their heads till their noses almost touch the ground, stand out in the middle of the fields motionless, like dead images.

"Now, too, a single rain-storm, like the above, breaks up all the paths and ways at once, and makes home no longer "home" to those who are not obliged to leave it, while it becomes doubly endeared to those who are. What sight, for instance, is so pleasant to the wearied woodman, who has been out all day long in the drenching rains of this month, as his own distant cottage window, seen through the thickening dusk, lighted up by the blazing faggot that is to greet his sure return at the accustomed minute? What is so pleasant a sight as this, except the window of the village alehouse, similarly seen, and offering a similar greeting to him who has no home, the wet and wayworn traveller?

"The name of home warns us that we are too long delaying our approach to its environs, even though they have little to offer us different from the comparative desolation that prevails elsewhere."

In moist and sheltered places in Autumn, we sometimes find the ground beautified with a variety of richly-coloured agaric,

from the scarlet to the white, with grey and brown, and all kinds of intermediate shades. Fungi are seldom seen in perfection until the evening damps and dews of October fall.

"There is a pale grey fungus," says Mr. Knapp, "that may very commonly be observed in September on the edges of heaps of manure, and in pasture-grounds, most beautifully delicate, almost like coloured water just congealed, trembling in the air from the slightness of its form, its sober tints softly blending with each other, lined and pencilled with an exactitude and lightness that defy imitation. The verdigris agaric is found under tall hedge-rows and near shady banks; and few can exceed it in beauty when just risen from its mossy bed in all the freshness of morning and of youth, its pale green-blue head varnished with the moisture of an Autumnal day, the veil irregularly festooned around its margin, glittering like a circlet of emeralds and topazes from the reflected colours of the pileus. But it is by examination alone that the beauties of this despised race can be perceived, not by a partial and inadequate description."

Many very beautiful specimens of fungi have we found in the woods of Lincolnshire, especially in Warton, Caistor, White's, and Lea Woods. One species in particular grew to an immense size, and was variegated and bossed with rich orange, white, and scarlet colours; some were called by the country people giant's-buttons, and all the large ones are considered poisonous.

The fruits of the orchard are all gathered in, and all but the keeping ones are gone; and the flowers of the garden are gradually growing thinner and thinner, and the places where they lately stood are forgotten.

Still, however, of the former we have the winter store, laid by in fragrant heaps in the low-roofed loft above the granary; which overlooks the new well-stocked farmyard, for even the pigs and poultry prefer home to wandering in the cold empty fields. We have yet left some few flowers that scatter their till now neglected beauties up and down the half-deserted parterre, and gain that admiration by their rarity which in the presence of their more fleeting rivals they were fain to do without; and even

a few that have not ventured to show their faces to the hot sun of summer, but are bold enough to bare them before the chilling

winds of winter. Of these, the most various and conspicuous are the few last chrysanthemums, shooting out their sharp rays of the different lengths, like stars—purple, and pink, and white,

and yellow; but all pale, faint, and scentless, and looking more like artificial flowers than real ones.

Some of the rich dahlias, too, still remain, unless the killing frosts have come; and the geraniums, that have been turned out of their winter homes into the open earth, still keep flowering profusely. But a single night's frost makes sad havoc among both these bright ornaments of the Autumn flower-garden; and what is to day a rich cluster of green leaves, interspersed with gay groups of flowers, may to-morrow become, by an invisible agency, an unsightly heap of corruption, the leaves looking as if they had just had one plunge in a vessel of boiling water, and would never uplift their green heads any more for ever.

Grasshoppers, which begin to chirrup in June, have long been silent. The question has often been asked, whether this insect is the cicada, so praised by the ancients. "Sweet prophet of the Summer!" says Anacreon, addressing it, "the Muses love thee! Phœbus himself loves thee, and has given thee a shrill song; old age does not wear thee; thou art wise, earth-born, musical, impassive, without blood; thou art almost like a god!" So attached were the Athenians to the cicada, we are told, that they were accustomed to fasten golden images of it in their hair, implying at the same time a boast that they, as well as the cicada, were earth-born. They were regarded as the happiest as well as the most innocent of animals,—not, we will suppose, for the reason given by the witty Rhodian Xenarchus, where he says,

> "Happy the cicada lives,
> Since they all have voiceless wives!"

The sound of this insect and of the harp were called by one and the same name. A cicada sitting upon a harp was an usual emblem of the science of music, which was thus accounted for: "When two rival musicians, Eunomus and Ariston, were contending upon that instrument, a cicada flying to the former, and sitting upon his harp, supplied the place of a broken string, and so secured to him the victory."

"Small fiery meteors, called falling-stars," says Forster, "are particularly common about this time of the year, and frequently

leave long trains of light behind them: this is usually a sign of wind, of which Virgil makes mention in his Georgics.

There are three sorts of falling-stars: the most common kind prevail in frosty Winter nights, and in Summer also, when there are dry easterly winds with a clear sky. They have very much the appearance of real stars, and have probably from this circumstance derived their name; they leave little or no train behind them, and shoot along in straight lines, generally obliquely downward, but sometimes horizontally.

The second kind are larger and more brilliant, and generally appear in warm summer evenings, particularly when wave clouds and electric clouds abound; some of them are very beautiful, and give much light. They vary in colour and size, and have sometimes a curvilinear motion.

The third sort are strikingly different from the two above-mentioned; they are generally small and of a beautiful bluish-white colour, but their peculiar characteristic is that of leaving long white trains behind them, which remain visible for some seconds in the track in which the meteors have gone. We have thought that their tails were the result rather of some gas set on fire by the meteor in its passage, than of any of the luminous substance of the meteor left behind."

After fine dry Summers, the sky is often strikingly beautiful at this time, particularly with light easterly breezes. The clouds then exhibit every conceivable variety of whimsical figures, and are richly coloured with the most natural tints by the setting sun. By moonlight, too, the appearance of the Autumn clouds is excessively elegant: extensive beds of sundered clouds floating gently along in different altitudes, must have attracted almost every one's notice. The beautiful appearance of these clouds, with a moonlight evening, has been aptly described by Bloomfield:—

> "For yet above these wafted clouds are seen
> (In a remoter sky still more serene)
> Others detach'd in ranges through the air,
> Spotless as snow, and countless as they're fair,—
> Scatter'd immensely wide, from east to west,
> The beauteous semblance of a flock at rest."

The following very beautiful lines from Coleridge illustrate all that was ever imagined of the soothing quiet which can only be found in the silent haunts of Nature in Autumn. They are a tribute from genius to the spirit of Solitude,—to the green Guardian of the earth ; heard, but seen not,—felt, too, but only in the heart. They show that religion and all goodness may be traced in the forms of Nature,—that contentment gathers its own happiness from her, and tranquillity finds its greatest solace "made up of meditated joy."

"A green and silent spot amid the hills !
A small and silent dell !—O'er stiller place
No singing skylark ever poised himself !
The hills are heathy, save that swelling slope
Which hath a gay and gorgeous covering on,
All golden with the never-bloomless furze
Which now blooms most profusely ; but the dell,
Bathed by the mist, is fresh and delicate
As vernal corn-field, or the unripe flax
When through its half-transparent stalks, at eve,
The level sunshine glimmers with green light.
Oh ! 'tis a quiet spirit-healing nook,
Which all, methinks, would love ; but chiefly he,
The humble man, who in his youthful years
Knew just as much of folly as had made
His early manhood more securely wise ;—
Here he might lie on fern or withered heath,
While from the singing lark—that sings unseen
The minstrelsy which solitude loves best—
And from the sun, and from the breezy air,
Sweet influences trembled o'er his frame ;
And he with many feelings, many thoughts,
Made up a meditative joy, and found
Religious meanings in the forms of nature !
And so, his senses gradually wrapp'd
In a half-sleep, he dreams of better worlds ;
And dreaming, hears thee still, O singing lark !
That singest like an angel in the clouds."

Alas ! for us, not him, "the old man eloquent" has voyaged to the silent sea, whose shore no mortal foot hath ever pressed :—

"After life's fitful fever he sleeps well."

Autumn and Spring are the best seasons to visit the lake districts, or any other where there is a rolling and tumbling

of water, which is then increased by moist atmospheres and heavy rains, and which is all the more beautiful if hemmed in by jagged rocks, and half-buried in trees.

There is always something delightful in the sound of falling waters—a dreamy quietness, a murmuring unlike the din of this work-a-day world, a kind of Eastern luxury. To stretch oneself upon a bank by a flowing weir, and listen to its bubbling music, is to be in a land of poetry: the starry silver spreading around one in its arched brilliance; the motion of trees, seen but not heard—a voice calling from over the water, but lost amid the liquid thunder; all aid the illusion, and bring before us a listening land, where every tongue seems hushed but that of the torrent. We almost feel as if we could become heathens, if the worshipping of waters might be renewed, and float our flowery tribute upon the waves to the unseen spirit of some sparry grot, or coral palace, or music-dropping cavern lighted with pointed crystals.

At this season of the year the ground is often covered with spiders' webs, which lie across the paths, extending from shrub to shrub, and are also often seen floating in the air. This silken substance is called gossamer, and is supposed to proceed from a large number of small spiders, which, when they want to change their situations, have the power of shooting forth several long threads, which becoming buoyant, they are, on them, carried through the air; but by coiling up the threads again they are able to descend gradually to the ground. Gilbert White makes mention of them while enjoying his field-sports in September, at which time the stubble and clover grounds were matted with cobwebs, the meshes of which were heavy with dew, looking as if the country was covered with setting-nets. The dogs could not hunt, for their eyes seemed blinded, and they were obliged to lie down and scrape the cobwebs from their faces with their feet.

As the morning advanced the day became bright and exceedingly warm for the time of year, and about nine o'clock a most unusual phenomenon attracted his attention, which was a shower of these cobwebs falling from "very elevated regions," and never ceasing until evening. White says they were not single films, but flakes or rays nearly an inch wide and five or six inches in length. From their bright silk-like texture they seemed to twinkle like stars, as they fell with their sides turned towards

the sun. They fell so thick on the trees and hedges, he adds, "that any person might have gathered baskets full." The opinion he hazards respecting these spiders and webs being drawn up into the air by evaporation, is entirely opposed to the fact recorded of one springing up and ascending from the book he was reading, when there was no stir of air.

It is supposed that plants, in Autumn, absorb oxygen during the night, but have not the power of giving it out again during the day, and that this causes the juices to become acid and change the colour of the leaf. Those leaves which become red —such as the cherry—may be affected in this way; but this is far from being the general colour. The plane-tree acquires a tawny colour; the oak, a yellowish green; the hazel, a yellow; the sycamore, a dirty brown; while the maple is a pale yellow; the hawthorn, a tawny yellow; horn-beam, a bright yellow; the ash, a fine lemon; and the elm, an orange.

He who now looks upon these changes, not only with a painter's or a poet's eye, but with the eye of a philosopher, will find ample employment for his mind in investigating the causes which enable some trees to retain their leaves unchanged, while others are compelled to cast them off to become the sport and plaything of the wintry blast.

What is called the fall of the leaf has been the subject of numerous speculations, all alike unsatisfactory. The fall of the leaf is not the death of the leaf; the action of one is vital, while the other is, in a great measure, mechanical. In the axilla or arm-pit of a leaf, which is the point where it joins the stem or branch, there will be found, upon careful inspection, a bud, the future stem or branch. This bud, in the greater number of trees, begins to swell in Autumn; and in very warm seasons expands to its full size and length, as it should do in Spring; and as this bud is always above the old leaf, so in the process of expansion it pushes the footstalk of the leaf downwards, and causes it to break off at the joint or point of connexion which subsists between all leaves and the stem or branch. Evergreens retain their leaves till Spring, as the buds do not swell in their arm-pits till that time. As a proof that

this is the real cause of the fall of the leaf, we need only remark what takes place when shrubs are transplanted. If by this operation the life of the plant be not destroyed, though the present leaves wither, new buds will expand, and push the old leaves off; but if the vital principle be destroyed, the leaves will wither as before, but will remain attached to the stem—a fact which every practical gardener considers clear evidence that the plant is dead. Still it is a melancholy sight to witness the falling leaves; to see all that rendered Summer so green and lovely, unhoused—drifted from their shady dwelling-places, leaving their old homes behind, naked and desolated, and wandering, as it were, houseless along the brown highways, over the wet and withered grass, or lying down to die in the wayside ditches. Who can walk abroad at such a season, without thinking of that change which must, in the end, take place—without turning our thoughts to those who have gone before us, like companions who but set out earlier in the day, and gained the inn where we must all sleep, they having only retired to rest a little time before we arrive?

Seeds and fruits are now ripe, and furnish their share of subsistence to man, bird, and beast; for Autumn is a time of abundance, a season of plenty, and that portion which cannot be consumed at the period of its maturity is stored up in various ways, and by different means, as provision against a time of need; and although we have not the vine and its clustering grapes to tread into our vats, the life and stir of the wine-growing countries is nearly equalled by the cider-pressing of our cider-making counties.

The wind that blows down the few last leaves, now roars around our rocky shores and tall headlands, and dashes the waves about the knees of those stony giants who kept a look-out over the ocean countless ages before a mast threw its shadow on the deep, or a keel ground down the gravel on the beach. The sea-loving children of England glory in the aged ocean that surrounds them; and where the sons and daughters of sunnier climes would tremble to venture, they proudly ride, shouting back the challenge of the winds, and

laughing as the spray dashes over their fearless Saxon faces. They love to hear the roar of the old sea in its anger, better than the sleepy Summer murmur of the little ripples that scarcely

stir a shell upon the sands; and are as fond of ships, which the Danes called sea-horses, as the old sea-kings ever were, when they roved proudly along what they poetically called

"The road of the swans."

Still this Autumn wind, that makes our seas so grand and terrible, destroys all the ornaments of our landscapes; and though only a few weeks ago the woods never looked so beautiful, nor did ever the hand of an artist throw such rich colours upon the glowing canvas as were then found in the variegated foliage of the trees, in the leaves of the beech which were dyed in the deepest orange that ever the eye saw gathered in golden clouds around a summer sunset; in the dark green of the oak, in parts mellowed into a bronzy brown, blending beautifully with the faded yellow of the chestnut, and the deeper hues of the tall elm; while here and there the sable fir settles down

into dark shadows between the alternate tints; and far as the eye could then range along the wide outskirts of the forest, it revelled in the mingled hues of mountain, field, ocean, and sky; as if the flowered meadow, and the purple mountain, and the green billows of the sea, the blazing sunset, and the dark clouds of evening, had all rolled together their bright and sombre hues, and gathered about the death-bed of Autumn;—nearly all is gone now, and where beauty reigned we find only nakedness. Not that all is blank yet; for the eye is still arrested by bunches of crimson and green berries which half tempt us by their gushing ripeness to taste the poisonous juice that lies buried beneath their deceptive beauty. The hips of the wild rose still rest their rich scarlet upon the carved ebony of the luscious blackberry; while the deep blue of the sloe throws over all the rich bloomy velvet of its fruit, as it stands crowned with a ruddy tiara of hawthorn berries. On the ground are scattered thousands of polished acorns, their carved and clear cups lying empty amongst the fallen leaves until gathered by the village children, who deck their rustic stools with these primitive tea-services, and assemble around them with smiling faces and looks of eager enjoyment, while they sip their sugar and water out of these old fairy-famed drinking vessels.

It has also, no doubt, struck many, during an Autumn ramble, how slowly and almost imperceptibly the changes of the months take place. The seasons themselves are striking enough; but to watch the slow progress by which they reach the different landmarks of the year, is like tracing the movement of the hand of a watch around the dial's face. Take a home garden, for instance—the smaller the better for observation—and recall the time when the first scarlet runner, nasturtium, sweet pea, or convolvulus sprang up, each a tiny speck of green above the mould. For days and days you can scarcely perceive them increase; the two little leaves grow larger by degrees; and then other tiny buds shoot out; and you are lost, between noting the expansion of the first, and the slow advance of the latter. Time rolls on, and they begin to twine and flower, one here, another there; you marvel why the one is so early, and the other so

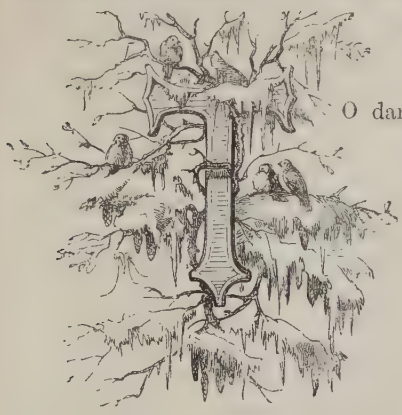
late. The first flowers attract your attention the most, and when the whole row is hung with bloom, you are anxious to find the first pod. It is the many stages through which vegetation passes that confuse observation, that induce us to take so little note of time, that cause Autumn to steal upon us almost unawares. It is the same with the lengthening and shortening of the days: we see the hours, and not the minutes—the rock, but not the coral insect that was instrumental in raising it.

The seed that falls upon the ground, again to spring forth in a new form—the rounded dew-drop that feeds the flower—the withered leaf which the Autumnal rain rots and forms into a rich nourishment for the buds of the following Spring, though disregarded by us, are all accomplishing their silent mission, and turning round that mighty wheel "on which the seasons roll."

DARK DECEMBER.

DARK DECEMBER.

CATTLE — SHAKESPERE'S WINTER SONG — SLEEP OF ANIMALS — FREEZING SHOWERS — SNOW-STORM — WORD-PAINTING OF WINTER — WINTER ON THE WOLDS — LAPWING — MOLE — A SHARP FROST.



O dark December we now turn our faces, for Winter has come at last, with his short days and long nights, and cold piercing winds, that seem at times to blow from a breath of ice. The very houses look cold; the village streets colder; even the few hips and haws have lost their warm crimson colour, and have a chill blue steely tinge, and a nipped-up look.

The farmer has much to attend to at this season; the cattle must be foddered late and early, for the fields afford but little nourishment. The sheep manage to pick up their food among the turnips; but after a severe frost they are hard put to it, and every bite tries the strength of their jaws. It is an amusing sight to watch the cattle waiting around a pond that is frozen over, and to observe what wistful glances they cast along the path where the farmer-man is accustomed to come to break up the ice. Or to observe them rummaging in the straw-yard, and how narrowly they watch at the barn-door, waiting for the thrasher to throw out the straw. Or to see the men hurry out in the night, if a noise is heard in the hen-roost, which they expect to find plundered either by thieves or the fox. Many sheep fall a prey to dogs in the winter season, which, having killed them, lap their blood, and leave the carcases in the fields.

Those who have read that exquisite little song of Shakespere's, at the close of "Love's Labour's Lost"—and who is there that has not?—can never forget the perfect and finished wintry picture which every line presents. The icicles are first seen hanging beside the wall like great, long, cold, bright-pointed spear-heads, which, only to look at, causes Dick, the shepherd, to blow his tingling nails more eagerly; to stamp, and jump, and shake off the clouted snow from his heavy shoes, as he beats his numbed feet upon the ground. Tom, who is seated beside the large old yawning kitchen fire-place, jumps up as if he were struck by the head of a cross-bolt, when he sees Marian enter, with her nose "red and raw," her milk, starred and frozen in the clean white pail, running down over the bright, cold, polished hoops, on which it has congealed, like beaded pearls. Tom wants no summoning; but, leaping up, with a "God a mercy," hurries off to the log-house, and, shouldering a couple of such mighty blocks as could only be burnt in the huge old-fashioned fire-places of Shakespere's day, rushes into the large hall without ceremony, well-nigh stumbling over the great shaggy stag-hound, which lies stretched out at the foot of the old knight, who, seated in his high-backed oaken chair, watches the sparks as they go dancing above the quaintly-fashioned and-irons, up the wide dark

chimney, and rubs his hands for very cold. Without, the wind is blowing bleak and bitter, whistling round the gable-ends of the ancient mansion, yet scarcely turning the frozen weather-cock; while beside the hedges, which stretch along the "foul ways," the birds sit shivering and brooding in the snow—cold, with all their feathers, and scarcely able to peck the frozen berries, though their pointed beaks are rendered sharper by hunger. Sunday comes, and in the old, cold, grey country church, where the figures of knights are freezing in icy mail, as their grim effigies lie stretched out with folded hands, the old knight, having left his hall, and his log fire, can scarcely hear a word the parson says, for the loud and incessant coughing. One aisle coughs against the other; north answers south—the sound is contagious; it is caught in the chancel, and all the rounded periods of the old divine are lost amid that never-ceasing chorus; and the old knight is thankful when he again plants his feet upon his own hearth, and sees his bowl of smoking lamb's-wool placed before him, on the surface of which the roasted crabs bob and hiss as they are popped in hot from the red logs which Tom had piled upon the fire. Outside, the staring owl is crying "To-whit, too-whoo," somewhere about the red-bricked twisted chimneys. Such is the picture which the immortal Poet has drawn of Winter, in twelve brief lines, each of which would form a text for a longer passage than we have written as a summary of the whole.

Now the brief days are cold, cheerless, and gloomy; the woods are naked and desolate; there is a sad, leaden, melancholy colour about the sky; the open country is silent, the fields are empty, the lanes abandoned by the village children, and, excepting the robin, you hear not the voice of a bird amid the whole landscape. You wander on in the direction of the village, and there, upon the large frozen pond, surrounded by a few aged willows, you behold a group of hardy rustics amusing themselves with the healthy exercise of sliding, and making a strange, hollow, and unearthly sound, as they run upon the ice. You see the sportsman far off, with his dogs and gun, and behold the white smoke rolling beside the hedge in the valley, while the report awakens

the low and sleeping echoes. Further on, along the frozen and cheerless road, you see the village carrier's grey-tilted cart,

rocking between the naked hedgerows, as it moves slowly on past the cold white guide-post, by the embankment which is

covered with withered and hoary grass, beside the long plantation where the snow is piled beneath the dark green fir-trees, past the reedy pool where the flags stand with their sharp frozen edges, looking as if they would cut like a sabre, so cold, keen, and piercing do they appear.

We must again allude to the Winter-sleep of many animals as a wonderful provision of nature—although we are perhaps wrong in giving the name of sleep to such a state of torpor, for it is neither produced by over-exertion, nor caused by a want of repose. Some, as we have before remarked, prepare for this uncertain state of slumber by storing up food against they awake, or revive—for either hunger, or a sudden change from cold to heat, or causes which are to us unknown, and against which several of our hibernating quadrupeds appear to guard, often rouse them at mid-Winter, and there is no doubt that they would perish were it not for this fresh supply of food. Some, like the dormouse and harvest-mouse, coil themselves up like a ball, and may be rolled about without evincing any sign of life while in this state; so may the hedgehog, although the latter ever assumes such a form when in danger, and presents the same lifeless appearance at pleasure, while, unlike the former, it lays up no store against Winter. The squirrel also passes a great part of the cold season in a torpid state, taking care, however, in case he should feel "the hungry edge of appetite," to have a dozen or two of well-stored larders in readiness, which he very often finds robbed, when he comes to visit them. But no one seems to lay up such provision for Winter as the long-tailed field-mouse, which consists of acorns, nuts, corn, and seeds of various descriptions, the accumulation of many a journey, which, when garnered, and nicely arranged, is often rooted up by some hog, as he comes grunting and smelling about the ground where this little hoarder has concealed his treasure. How he manages to pass the Winter when his house is thus broken open and robbed we are at a loss to divine, for we can readily imagine that one who has made such bountiful provision in his chamber, would not be able to rest long together when it is empty. The bats also hibernate, huddling together for warmth, and not only

holding on the roofs, and beams, and caverns, and in the hollows of trees, by their claws, but crowding over one another, until it is really wonderful what numbers are congregated in so small a space as they are often found to occupy. These hibernating animals may be compared to the seed which, though not dead, is hidden in the earth to appear again in due season.

There is something beautiful to a fanciful mind in the varied forms which the frost-work assumes; and although we must venture out of doors to witness the most wonderful productions formed by this strange and silent hand, still those who are too fearful of the cold, or too indolent to venture forth, may discover within doors traces of the finger of this Hoary Worker—shrub, and flower, and leaf, as of net-work and cunning embroidery, all wrought in one night by this silent and unseen enchanter. What wild landscapes does he put together! mountains, and deep gorges, and steep precipices, with overhanging pines that seem ready to drop into the dark gulf below—for such are among the many wonders which this artist produces. Strange effects are also wrought by a sudden freezing shower, when the rain encloses all it falls upon, as if with a glass covering, or clings to larger objects, and hangs them about with gems of the clearest crystal, until—

> "In pearls and rubies rich the hawthorn show,
> While through the ice the crimson berries glow,"

These showers also produce a startling effect upon birds, causing them to flutter and shake out their wings to get rid of the cumbersome jewels that only impede their free and natural motions. Yet this very power slowly produces the mighty glacier that, in its thunderous fall, shakes the whole valley into which it descends. Winter is considered a dead season, though even in a severe winter the out-of-door naturalist will find many objects to instruct and interest him, and may become acquainted with the habits of many living things which the full-leaved Summer enshrouds. Birds, which at other times seldom venture near the abode of man; insects, which a fine day of sunshine has aroused from a torpid state; and animals, which the floods or hunger have forced from their hiding places; for even the little harvest-

mouse, either driven from the barn by the removal of the corn, or disturbed from its winter slumber in the earth, may sometimes be seen hurrying off through the shelter of a leafless hedge to its retreat; for,

Nature in her sleep is never still.

But Winter does not sleep for long together undisturbed, for even he is cheered with occasional glimpses of bright sunshine, that reveal now and then beautiful patches of clear blue sky, telling him that Spring is somewhere at hand behind the clouds, and keeps withdrawing the curtain that conceals her, to look down upon him as if she were eager to return. Winter grasps not his icy sceptre with so firm a hand as he did when he first arrived; the bleating of the young lambs alarm him; and the merry cawing of the noisy rooks tells him that his reign is drawing to a close; for sometimes he feels a rounded daisy stirring beneath his naked feet, though it is still invisible to the human eye; and all these things warn the hoary and bearded old Monarch that he must soon resign his throne to the beautiful young Queen who only awaits the opening of the flowers before she is crowned. Now and then he raises "his old right arm," and compels us to confess his power; but the golden crocus dazens his dim eyes, and the daisies grow larger in spite of his anger; the elder puts out a few green buds, and the willows begin to show their silvery catkins; and while he sleeps, the sunshine is ever peeping out—signs which proclaim the hour of his departure is drawing nigh; for—

"Shadows of the silver birch
Sweep the green above his grave."

Then we miss the few early and hardy flowers which we saw only the day before, and awake to find that the snow has fallen all night long, and continues throughout the day without ceasing. Over the wide, bleak, unsheltered common it lies deep and untrodden, blown here and there into wild, fanciful ridges, just as the ground rises and falls, or where the wind has whirled it; and it is only by some white-covered hillock of stones, a furze-bush of

taller growth, the remains of an aged hawthorn, and the relics of an old finger-post, that a practised eye is enabled to trace the winding of the road. All around hangs the low, dull, leaden-coloured sky, so low, that, as far as the eye can stretch, it seems to rest everywhere upon the snow, save where, on the furthest rim of the horizon, the level monotony of the line is broken by a low range of hills, now covered with snow. It is so cold and cheerless a day, that not even a donkey—the hardiest defier of wind and weather—is to be seen in the whole wide range of the sky-bounded common, for even he has sought a shelter in some unseen hollow; nothing stirs amid the wild solitude of the wintry scene, save the ever-falling snow.

Still there are a few evergreens, which mock the rigour of the season, and preserve their foliage in all the pride of Summer greenery, as if refusing to be conquered; and which, although less in fashion than they were formerly, have not altogether disappeared from among the few simple ornaments with which we decorate jolly old Christmas. Among the foremost of these are the holly and ivy, which have long borne the name of "Christmas," and are looked upon by the boys as almost the only tangible part of this festive season, excepting the plum-pudding.

But of all the green things that bring Summer to the sunshine of our hearths at this season, there are none so dearly prized as the mistletoe-bough—"the hanging branch," as an old writer says, "that looks down from the roof upon the gentle thieves beneath, and catches a kiss upon every leaf as it comes smacking upward on the wings of either a sigh or a blush."

It seems but as yesterday when we were assembled in the old large parlour to keep up merry Christmas. The knot of everlasting flowers was removed from the large hook in the centre of the ceiling, and in their place glittered a green mistletoe-bough, whose berries we could as soon number as we could tell all the kisses given under them. What sweet faces the fire flashed upon! what eyes,

"which ever loved the ground,"

saving when they glanced upward upon the mysterious branch, and seemed to search for a charm secreted among the leaves! Even now they throng before us, glancing upon the flickering flames that gild the wall, for it is twilight. There are dark

locks mingling with the shadows, and swan-like necks moving in the pale pillars of light,

> "And eyes as fair
> As star-beams among twilight trees."

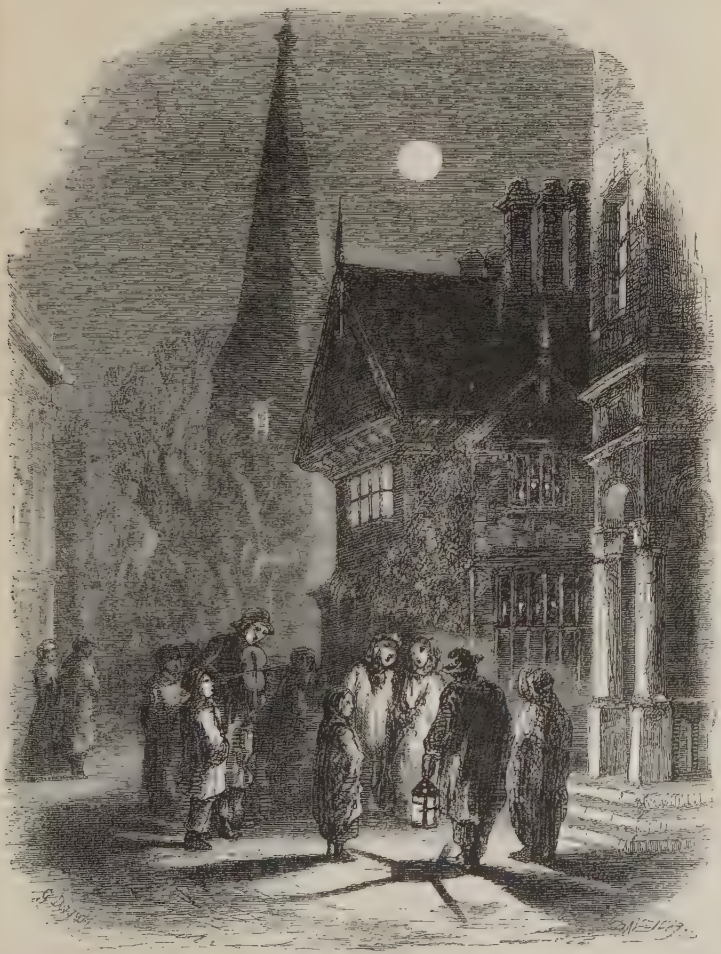
We can almost hear the music of their voices, whispering like the low wind, or the long tongues of flame that are now mur-

muring a melody to the barry grate, as if talking of the old festivals and beautiful faces they have looked upon together; or likest the sound of gentle kisses, smothered in their own soft words, which were driven back to reply to the heart,—or a bee singing itself to sleep in a flower. But love and beauty, and friendship and happiness, and dear old friends, and kind-hearted relatives, and playfellows, and schoolboy-days, and those who are dead,—or are living we know not where, so long a time has elapsed since we last saw them,—these are not the only things conjured up by the remembrance of the mistletoe. We turn to the darker ages—to the gloomy groves of the Druids, to groups of England's early daughters kneeling beneath the sacred oaks, with eyes fixed on the long-bearded priest who, with the golden sickle glittering in his palsied hand, cut down the holy-boughs.

Polydore Virgil says, "Trimming of the temples with hangings, flowers, boughs, and garlands, was taken from the heathen people, who decked their idols and houses in such array." And Chandler throws both beauty and poetry around the superstitions of the ancient Celts in thus accounting for the origin of adorning their houses and temples. "They were decked," he says, "with evergreens in December, that the spirits of the woods might repair to them, and remain unnipped with frost and cold winds, until a milder season had renewed their darling abodes." And Stow also says, that not only houses and churches were adorned with green branches, but also conduits, standards, and crosses in the streets were decked with whatsoever the year afforded to be green. It is pleasant to think and look upon an innocent custom which has outlived hundreds of years, and is still the same.

We also read, in the Bible, of Nehemiah ordering the people at a festive season to "Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees;" and to make green arbours, "every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God." And who that has ever perused the New Testament can forget Christ's entry

into Jerusalem, when the multitude "cut down branches from the trees and strewed them in the way?"



Beautiful are these associations between man and Nature, festivals and flowers, rejoicings and green boughs. Izaak Walton

felt this when he "thought the fields too pleasant to be looked upon excepting on holidays."

In ancient times Christmas brought the peer and peasant closer together than it does now: there were the Waits singing at midnight, and the Christmas carol chanted in the hall, which was decorated with evergreens; while the heavily-laden table was covered with plenty from morning to night, and all who came were welcome there. The Yule-log blazed, and the berry-brown ale, with its creamy head, stood foaming in mighty tankards, ready to wash down slices of the huge oxen, which were often roasted whole. Even the very poor were well fed and made happy; for the wealthy landholder could never have sat down and eaten his own Christmas dinner with enjoyment, if he thought the humblest serf on his estate lacked anything at that old and holy time; for, as one of the ancient carols says,

> "Old Christmas is come to keep open house,
> And would scorn to be guilty of starving a mouse."

The mistletoe grows on various kinds of trees, particularly on the hawthorn and the apple; and, though but very rarely, on the oak. It is said that when the Druids consecrated a grove of oak-trees, they always planted an apple orchard near it, in order that there might be a chance of the mistletoe spreading from the apple-trees to the oaks. When the Druids found the mistletoe growing on the oak, they went in solemn procession to cut it, which was always done with a golden knife, and the mistletoe was received in a piece of white linen, that had never been used for any other purpose. The Saxons, also, revered the mistletoe; and the following curious legend is related in the "Edda" respecting it. Balder (the Saxon Apollo) wishing to visit earth, Friga, his mother (the Saxon Venus), was so afraid that some accident would happen to him, that she made everything that belonged to the earth, the air, or the water take an oath not to injure him. Unfortunately, however, she forgot the mistletoe, which belonged neither to the earth, nor the air, nor the water; and the evil spirit Loke, who wished to destroy Balder, killed him with a large branch of mistletoe. All nature

was instantly overwhelmed with grief for the loss of the god of the sun; but at the end of three months, Thor (who was the Jupiter of the Saxons) restored Balder to life, and placed the mistletoe under the sole control of Friga, that it might never injure her again. It was probably from the mistletoe being dedicated to the Saxon goddess of love, that it is hung up at Christmas, in country places, for people to kiss under. It was formerly supposed that the mistletoe could not be sown, but it is now found that a berry may be inserted in a crack in the bark of a tree, and then, if a piece of oiled paper be tied loosely over it, to preserve it from the birds, it will germinate.

The Christmas rose is one of the fairest flowers that adorns the brow of Winter, and looks cheerfully out from amid the surrounding desolation. It is a large, handsome, cup-shaped flower, looking like a single rose, and being either white or a very pale pink; and though, in the open air, the delicate texture of its flowers is often uninjured by the frost, or melting snow, which so frequently covers the ground at the dreary season. When grown in a sheltered place, or when the weather chances to be mild, it will keep in flower for some time, and is as ornamental as any of the flowers of Summer. Its botanic name is black hellebore, so called from the black skin which covers its fleshy underground stem, or root, as it is commonly called, though there are attached to this fleshy substance abundance of the real or fibrous roots. The plant is used in medicine, but it is poisonous when taken to excess. Its name is taken from two Greek words, signifying deadly food. There are several kinds of hellebore, but the Christmas rose is by far the most ornamental.

The fragrant coltsfoot is another plant which flowers about Christmas; and it is not only ornamental, but very fragrant.

Among the few other plants in flower at this season may be mentioned the curious variety of hawthorn called the Glastonbury thorn, which is said always to flower on Christmas Day. Although this is not the case, it is a fact that the plant blossoms again in December, though it has ripe fruit on it from its previous blossoming at the ordinary season in May. The legend is,

that, in ancient times, Glastonbury was situated on an island called Avalon; the waters that surrounded it, and which consisted of a lake communicating with the sea, are now dried up, though where the lake formerly was, marshy ground may still be seen. Joseph of Arimathæa is said to have come to Britain with his disciples to preach the Gospel; and, having landed on the isle of Avalon, to have struck his stick into the ground, which immediately took root, budded, and blossomed, being on the Christmas Day; and, since that time, says hoary tradition, the plant has always budded and blossomed on Christmas Day. The Glastonbury thorns, which are now common in every part of England, are all taken from an original stock, still existing within the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey; but it is said that there is another in the neighbourhood, which is much older than the one growing in the ruins, and which blossoms about the same time.

But still there is consolation even in the midst of all this snow and silence, for by the end of December the shortest day is over and gone; it will not be dark so early as it has been; and we can see daylight sooner of a morning than we could a week ago. What room have we to pause and moralise here! thick as motes in the sun rush together the crowding images—dark, light, fear, hope, pain, pleasure, sorrow, joy, which we will leave to be worked out by the reader's fancy; holding it good for him that there ought to be halting-places where he can rest at times, and dream alone.

Snow in the streets of a city cannot be endured; it has scarcely fallen before it wears an old, grey, dirty look on the pavement; it is mingled with the mire trod by ten thousand footsteps; it is swept into the middle of the road by the shopkeeper, then wheels roll over it, and it is trampled beneath the hoofs of horses, and you can scarcely bear to look out of the window at the "slushy" and filthy streets until the dirty mass is swept up and carted away. In the country it lies like a "wintry veil" upon the face of the landscape; the banks appear in the distance like barriers of white marble; the hills, like ranges of silver clouds; and when the sun shines you can

scarcely discern the rim of the horizon, so beautifully are the snowy summits of the hills and the fleecy edges of the clouds blended together—harmonizing, like the lips of a sleeping maiden with the rose-leaf which blew from the bush and settled upon them while she slumbered.

Winter nips the fingers of the woodman until he can scarcely bend them round the handle of his axe, so stiff and benumbed do the joints become. During the keen frost the ditcher tries in vain to force his spade into the ground, for the earth rings like iron, and gives back a "strange alien sound" at every stroke. In one night the gardener sees his winter-greens shrivelled up as if they had been scorched by fire, his "potatoe-pie" is frozen, and icicles hang beneath the glasses that shelter his tenderest plants. Spring is asleep deep down beneath the cold.

Winter is called the Gate of the Year—the Entrance Hall that leads to the seasons. We must pass through the grey leaden-coloured portico, supported with glittering pillars of ice, before we can reach the flowery doors of Spring, beyond which the dark green gates of Summer open, while far behind Autumn swings wide upon its golden hinges, revealing a landscape that

looks like the ocean basking in the yellow sunshine, its waves the ever-moving uplands, waving drowsily with eary corn.

The walls of this solemn hall, which open indistinctly upon a longer twilight, and silently diminish the darkness that hangs upon the edge of the expanding day, are formed of grey snow, propped up by the mighty bulk of naked forest-trees; the knotted and iron elbows of which are linked one with the other —while around hang life-like pictures, all in keeping with the scene—landscapes of ice and snow with cold looks that are half warmed by the dark foliage of the evergreens, and cheered by the rounded crimson of the holly-berries, while the trailing ivy, from which the snow-flakes have melted, clasps the cottage chimney whence the curling smoke ascends in trails of blue and silver, like clouds that have lost their way, and are wandering back again to the sky. There spreads out a lonely mere, seeming darker through contrast with the snow-wreaths which surround it, while, deep below, the trees look down, as if cut out from solid ebony; and the crisped reeds, the ghastly skeletons of Summer, whisper to each other with a frozen breath, as if they dreaded that the bleak north wind should overhear their husky rustling, or with his cutting shears lay them prostrate, blanched, withered, and dead.

In another picture we see a rustic stile; the snow that rests upon the barked bars is imprinted with the robin's feet, while his scarlet breast, harmonising beautifully with the cluster of crimson hips that droop from the leafless spray of the wild rose, form a cheerful foreground to the desolate moorland that lies behind; and as we look upon the open beak of the bird, and his black-beaded and fearless eye, we can fancy that we hear him singing as sweetly as if Summer still stood on tiptoe, with her hair unbound, and held between her rosy fingers her streaming garland of long green leaves.

Further on we behold the blue titmouse, hanging by its hooked claws, back downward, yet never fearful of falling, peeping with curious eye beneath the level-clipped, broad-thatched eaves in search of insects; while the white cat, motionless, as if cut out of marble, sits watching upon the smooth-bricked window-sill,

sometimes feigning sleep, yet ready to spring up if only a straw fall from the beak of the busy bird. Past the church porch, whose steep roof is covered with unruffled flakes, an old beggar-man in his threadbare coat moves slowly along, his head bow-bent; the cutting wind that comes sweeping round the low square tower, blows back his long silver hair, on which the unmelted snow rests, and he pulls his weather-beaten hat lower over his forehead, and grasps his long staff firmer with his cold blue hands as he faces the eddying gust.

Whichever way the observant eye turns, this great Hall that opens upon the year is hung with pleasing pictures, and filled with interesting objects. On the dark beams that span above, the bat folds up his leathern wings, and, with his head drooping, soundly sleeps; the little dormouse, coiled up like a ball, rests in its burrow, beneath the roots of the antique oak; and should it chance to awaken before the warm days come, feeds upon the hoard it has secured, then folds itself up again in its dark chamber, and waits until it sees the sunshine streaming from the chinks of the inner door of Spring. High overhead, though still below the heavy snow-filled clouds, is heard the shrill scream of the wild geese; their arrowy-pointed ranks cleave the chilly air, as they sail at night far over the silent town to where the reedy marsh and the sedgy morass stretch out, intercepted by melancholy streams, on the surface of which, excepting themselves only, the shadow of the solitary fowler in his boat is seen to move. There, when the wind stirs the ridgy ripples in the calm moonlight, the wild swan sleeps majestically upon the rocking eddies, the underdown of his silver plumage bared by the fitful gusts that come by sudden starts and then are still, although the rocking motion uncoils not his arched neck, nor unfolds the black beak which is thrust for warmth under his wing.

Without, on the frosted branches, the fieldfares sit huddled together in their feathery coats, looking with hungry eyes upon the few withered berries, black and hard, which the wintry wind has left; while, in the distance, the poor sheep pause every now and then to give a plaintive bleat, as they cease for a moment

their cold labour of burrowing for food amid the knee-deep snow; for every way the country around is covered with it, the fields are all but silent, the high roads are no longer alive with

busy figures, and where the heavily-laden waggon moves slowly along, it comes with a dead and muffled sound, unlike the cheerful tramp and gritty creak which grinds down the wayside pebbles into Summer dust.

Few, excepting they are true lovers of nature, would be tempted to climb the summit of a steep hill, to witness the strange and beautiful appearance the landscape below presents if covered deeply with snow. Ascend, and you seem as if looking over a country that is silent and uninhabited. The hedges rise, like white walls, built up as boundary lines through a vast expanse, that one way present no other landmark, excepting a few trees and the black line of a winding river; all beside is one wide outstretched territory of snow. Objects which at other times are familiar to the eye, have assumed new shapes; the thatched roof of the cottage and the hayrick, the shed in the field and the high pile of Winter faggots, have all put on a strange disguise; and, but for the smoke which is distinguishable above the low chimney, there is no stir of life to proclaim the existence of man. To the left, the village spire rises like a lonely monument above a buried country, which seems to tell that all below are dead; for the roads are no longer visible, and what motion there is in the little hamlet is unperceived. It seems as if it had drifted far away, and was fast sinking in the centre of a great and silent sea of snow, the church-spire alone visible above the floating and far-off wreck.

> "Formless, the pointed cairn now scarce o'ertops
> The level dreary waste; and coppice-woods,
> Diminished of their height, like bushes seem."

And there the lapwing, with its beautiful crest of feathers, went wailing over the hills and wheeling about the wild wide marshes, darting and jerking to and fro on the wing, until, as an old Lincolnshire fen-shooter used to say, it was as "hard to hit as a guat." When boys, many a time have we wandered over those solitudes, and captured the young ones by fastening strings round their legs, and pegging the string into the ground, leaving the parent birds to feed the little prisoners until they

were well penned and ready to be taken; for if we once left them in the nest free until they could run, we seldom saw them again. In our young days they were commonly kept in gardens, their wings cut to prevent their escape; and handsome fellows

they looked with the tuft of plumes blowing about their heads. It is said that this bird is so artful, that it will make a noise on the ground like a mole, and that the worm, hearing the sound, mistakes it for his underground enemy, and comes out and is swallowed by the watchful lapwing. Golden and grey plovers, god-wits, coots, water-rails, and the whole tribe of birds that frequent marsh and mere, rivers and reeds, fens and flats, wintered in that wild neighbourhood; but the fens and wolds are no longer what they were; the broad beds of reeds and osier-holts are disappearing, and over some of our once hedgeless marshes the railway-engine now hurries with fiery speed.

Many an old river-bed is now dry, over which the ancient Britons paddled their wicker coracles, or boats covered with the "black bull's hide;" and you now see only the high banks upheaving on either hand, and walk in the waterless river-bed, where centuries ago Saxon and Danish vessels sailed. You might in such places fancy that you were wandering through an uninhabited world, or that every trace of those who had formerly lived in those lonely solitudes was swept away. Rude huts overlooking the river, from which, in early days, the skin-

clad fisherman watched the huge sturgeon swim, and the black porpoise roll, while the salmon glanced past like a ray of moonlight, as it showed its silvery scales; and there the huge pike darted upon its prey, while the bittern murmured in the marsh, and the plover wailed above the willows, and sharp-edged water-flags rustled together and made a melancholy sound amid the fretting of the waters.

Wild, silent, and uninhabited have we found places which we have traversed in England during Winter in our own day—the far-extending cliff country of Lincolnshire, backed by the high and villageless wolds, that seemed in the distance to go climbing up until it was lost in the grey and leaden-coloured sky. On the huge table-lands which ascended, ledge above ledge, telling where for ages the locked-up waters had remained stationary, we have seen the snow lie white, deep, silent, and untrodden, just as if it had been blown over the broad and shelterless valleys, and left there, height above height, like Alp on Alp. The flocks of sheep, that picked up a scanty subsistence in Summer on those stony barriers of dried-up oceans, had been driven miles away by the herdsman into the lowlands; and thus all along the ridges of those high and silent wolds no living object, except some solitary bird, was seen to move. Neither hedge, nor shed, nor fence, were there on that high and heaving ridge of wild hills, nor aught which bore sign or imprint of the hand of man. The few naked trees that hung leaning over the steep precipice-like ledges, looked as if they had been washed there ages ago, and left motionless one above the other by the sudden subsiding of those mighty waters. The gathering night, and the blinding snow-storm, with the howling wind blowing full in his face, would even now make the stout heart of a stranger quail, if, unacquainted with the country, he found himself there alone in the dusky close of a cold brief December day; for there,

> "Along the woods, along the moorish fens,
> Sighs the sad genius of the coming storm;
> And up among the loose disjointed cliffs,
> And fractured mountains wild, the brawling brook
> And cave presageful send a hollow moan,
> Resounding long in list'ning fancy's ear."—THOMSON.

Descending from those heights, we came to the banks of old lonely rivers, whose waters were only ploughed by the keel of the fowler's boat, while he, stretched out at the bottom, glided in silence along, between the high armies of tall and tufted reeds and sharp-edged water-flags, that glittered like scimitars through the hoar-frost; and tall naked rows of osiers, whose stocks or roots were buried beneath the snow, until he arrived within shot of the whole flock of wild fowl, when, springing up on the sudden, like an apparition, bang went both his barrels in a moment, making a sudden splash upon the surface of the water, which the next minute was covered with the feathered bodies of the wounded and the slain. You saw the smoke rolling away like a silvery cloud above the heads of the tufted bulrushes—heard the echoes of his gun die along the hill-side—just caught the low lapping of the water as it was disturbed by the motion of his boat—then, saving the wind that whistled over the frozen sedge and blew bleakly through the naked willows, all again was still.

You wandered along by the road-side spring, which is never frozen over, and saw the little wagtail striding about, the very

smallest of all our birds, which appears not to have its legs tied, and looks as if it scorned to go hopping along like many of the feathered race, but boldly lifts up one foot after the other, and struts, and looks around, as if it were marching at the head of a whole regiment of wagtails. True to the country in which he was bred, he disdains to number himself among the feathered gentry who hurry off, long before the approach of Winter, to

seek a warmer climate; but like his companion the robin, and the golden-crested wren, braves our severest seasons, and, trusting to chance and his own industry, picks up his living as he best can, about spring-heads and water-courses, where a few insects are still to be found; and so between hunting for a living, sleeping, and amusing himself, he wiles away the dull Winter, until Spring throws her primrose-coloured garment over the sky.

The only sound, except the wind, that appears to give a voice to the wintry landscape, is the murmuring of the river; when that is frozen over and silent, it seems as if the pulse of Nature had ceased to beat—as if the last stir of life was motionless—earthed as in a grave; that Hope had at last sunk down in very despair—she who had so long,

> Patient with bow'd head, silent stood,
> And on her golden anchor leant,
> And watch'd below the sleeping flood,
> Where Winter, 'mid the dreariment,
> Half-buried in the drifted snow,
> Lay sleeping on the frozen ground;
> Unheeding how the wind did blow
> Bitter and bleak on all around.

Those who are not accustomed to study the habits of birds, would conclude that it is difficult for them to survive in England during our hard winters, especially such as are called the soft-billed; but were they to watch their habits narrowly, they would perceive that outhouses, stables, holes in old decayed walls, gate-posts, the stems of large hollow trees, spring-heads (which seldom freeze), places where cattle are kept up and foddered in winter, all abound in food of various descriptions, suitable to their nature; such as insects in their aurelia state, flies and spiders that have concealed themselves until the cold weather is over, and numberless insects that abound under the layers of dead leaves. The vision of birds is extremely acute, and it is probable that what we should not be able to discover without the aid of a microscope, is to them perfectly visible, and that they find food in the eggs of insects, &c., which we are totally unacquainted with.

Sometimes, if December chances to be a mild month, there is still a green Spring-look about the meadows, where the grass has sprouted up afresh beneath the Autumn rains, especially in those pastures from which the cattle were driven away early in the season. Under the hedgerows, and among the shady copses, peeping from amid the fallen foliage, we see at times the hardy leaves of the primrose and the violet, looking as green and fresh as if it were already the first month of Spring, for neither frost nor snow has power to destroy them in these sheltered places. Near spring-heads, we see the pied and yellow wagtails; the larks huddle together in small parties, and seem, by their wistful looks, to wish that the air was warm enough to sing in; and if an unusually fine day should break out by the close of the next month, they will be seen trying their wings a little way up amongst the trees, and scattering around a few stray notes; and sometimes, at this season of the year, we see the porch of a cottage wreathed with the China rose, whose pale blossoms throw out a faint sweet perfume, and, with the green foliage, form a Summer-like scene amid the gloom, and cloud, and darkness of mid-Winter. The author of "Waverley" has left us a most graphic picture of the *ennui* which sometimes besets the hardy sportsman at this season. It is full of minute and excellent painting, and abounds in those little touches which tell that it has been struck off while hot from the anvil:—

"When dark December glooms the day,
And takes our Autumn joys away
When sylvan occupation's done,
And o'er the chimney rests the gun,
And hang in idle trophy, near,
The game-pouch, fishing-rod, and spear;
When wiry terrier, rough and grim,
And greyhound with his length of limb,
And pointer, now employed no more,
Cumber our parlour's narrow floor;
When in his stall the impatient steed
Is long condemned to rest and feed;
When from our snow-encircled home,
Scarce cares the hardiest step to roam,
Since path is none, save that to bring
The needful water from the spring

When wrinkled news-page, twice conn'd o'er,
Beguiles the weary hour no more,
And darkling politician crossed,
Inveighs against the lingering post;
And answering housewife sore complains
Of carriers' snow-impeded wains;—
When such the country cheer, I come,
Well-pleased, to seek our city home."

The kitchen-garden is worth peeping into at this time, when there is so little to be seen in the out-of-door world. The earthed-up celery-beds have a fresh and green appearance, and the lettuces which were planted late, wear a healthy Spring look, while kale, brocoli, cabbages, and Winter greens of every description, have a crispy and tempting tenderness, which is fully appreciated when they come to throw their odour around the table, as they are placed beside the red and juicy ham, and the well-fed pullets. If a hare or rabbit cross our path, we scarcely regard them with the eye of a naturalist now, but think what a flavour there would be about the one jugged, and the other, with a few accessories, wrapt up under the comfortable crust of a pie.

The rosemary flowers this month; and there were few plants held in higher esteem than this by our ancestors. They used it to stir up the spiced Christmas tankard; it was also dipped in their drinking-cups at weddings, and borne before the bridal party as they went to church. It was strewed upon the dead; and Herrick, in allusion to these customs, says that the rosemary

"Grows for two ends, it matters not at all,
Be it for my bridal or my burial."

Still, even in Dark December, the sunshine comes with its awakening hand, and shakes gray-bearded old Winter in his chilly sleep, causing the icicles which bind him down to rattle again, while breathing into his frozen ear tidings that days are lengthening, and bidding him hold himself in readiness to rise, and make room for the snowdrops, which are already forcing their way through the hard earth his bulk has pressed so heavily down.

During the cold weather, the mole is busy working his way still deeper underground, for the further the frost penetrates,

the lower he digs in quest of the worms which the cold has driven so far down; these are its favourite food. In the north of England, it is still called the mouldi-warp, mole being a common expression for soil, and warp for the earth which is turned up. Thus, the silt, or mud which is left by the side of rivers, is invariably called warp in the midland counties; the furrows in ploughed fields are also called warp; and newly-ploughed land, warp-land. I am thus particular in giving the full meaning to the word, as it is pure, unaltered Saxon; and I have no doubt that the mole was called the mouldi-warp, long before Alfred the Great sat upon the throne of Wessex. Those who are unacquainted with that curious structure called a mole-hill, have but a faint idea of the chambers and galleries, and

courts, and streets, which branch out beneath the little hillock they so often meet with during a country ramble. The encampment of the mole is its hunting-ground, its forest, its chase; in some one or another of these long, winding, under-ground avenues, it is sure to meet with prey; and the mole is a most persevering hunter, visiting his preserves many times during the day. It is always in excellent condition; and in the North, "fat as a mouldi-warp" is an old and common saying. It is not only a great eater, but also a great drinker; and, although it is not more than five inches long, will not hesitate to attack either a mouse, a bird, a lizard, or a frog. It will even prey upon its own species, when hard driven, as has been clearly proved, by placing two in a box, without a sufficiency of food. We consider that the experiments which were made by the celebrated naturalist, Le Court, have sufficiently proved that the mole is not blind, although there is an imperfection in the development of the visual organ. The mole generally produces

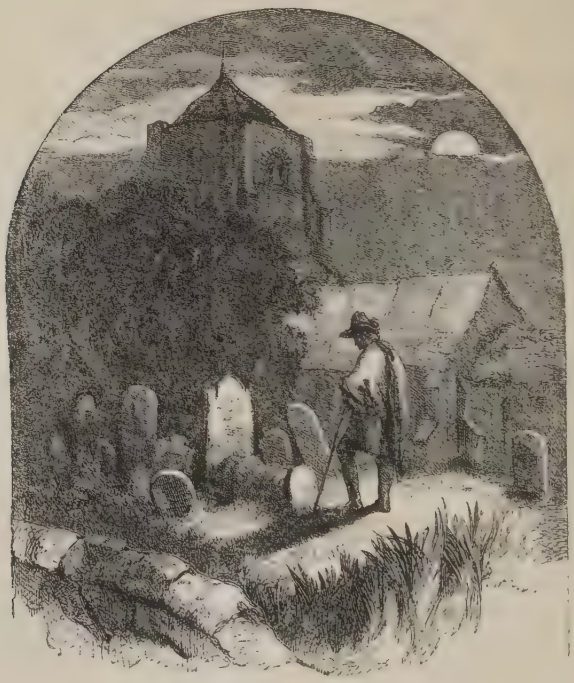
four or five young at a time, and even as many as seven have been found in one nest.

At this season of the year a bitter black frost sometimes sets suddenly in, which makes itself felt everywhere; the few green things that remain, curdle and wrinkle up as if they had been scorched; nothing seems to grow, the little hardy bud makes no progress, the earth looks as if it had changed to stone, and beneath it Nature lies dead and buried. The poor birds, as if for condolence, come nearer to the habitation of man—upon the palings, upon the garden-hedge, and about the farm-yard, we see many whose plumage is new to us, and whom hunger alone has driven from the deep seclusion of the woods.

In one bleak biting night the pond is frozen over, and, deluded by the dazzling surface of ice, the cattle, more thirsty through the dry, hard, moistureless food which forms their winter diet, hang down their heads to drink, when, instead of the cold yielding water, their hot breath comes in contact with the chilly marble-like ice, and after several vain attempts to penetrate it, they raise their heads and low piteously, nor cease until the farmer-boy either comes with a mallet or a long pole, breaks through the hard mass, and leaves them to drink their fill. Numbers of fish perish at this time of the year in the ponds and reservoirs, through want of air and food, with both of which it is easy to supply them by breaking holes in the ice, and throwing in bread, grain, or the offals of animals, for unless this is done, they will soon begin to devour each other. It is a well-known fact that fish will come at the call of those who are accustomed to feed them, take food from the hand of their keeper, and allow themselves to be touched without attempting to escape, or displaying any symptom of fear. Eels will bury themselves in the mud as a protection from cold, and the carp, it is also believed, seeks the same retreat in severe weather.

Yet, under this vast winding-sheet, that seems to cover the dead, Nature is still at work; the seed that remains invisible is silently swelling and bursting below, and in a few more weeks pale lines of green will show where the Spring corn has broken through the furrow. The little brown rounded bud is forming,

coil within coil, and will ere long thrust its emerald point from out its confined cell, as if timidly peeping forth, and waiting until the rain and the sunshine called it to bare its broad green beauty to the breeze; and the Spring we now mourn over will arise, and scatter flowers around the grave in which she has so long slumbered.



MID-WINTER.

AN OLD SAXON WINTER — FROST — ROBIN — WOODS IN WINTER — SNOWDROP — WINTER NIGHT — TWELFTH-NIGHT — SNOW — ROSEMARY — PLOUGH-MONDAY — UNDATED ENGLAND.

OUR Saxon ancestors gave fine old simple names to the seasons, the months, and the divisions of day and night. To them we are indebted for those true poetical words Mid-winter, Mid-summer, mid-day, and mid-night. King Alfred, with scarcely an alteration, spelt and sounded those very words just as we do in the present day—just as I have written them down now, so did that great English king write them down in the little note-book which the learned and good old Asser made for him.

What a picture of the wild and fearful Winters of ancient times is presented in the name they gave to January, which they called Wolf-month, on account of the ravages made by that animal at this dreary and desolate season of the year. Then our island abounded with huge morasses, swampy wastes, lonely moors, and vast tracts of dreary forest-land, and over these snowy solitudes, in the dark midnights of Winter, the howl of the wolf was heard, as, ravenous for prey, he ventured nearer the Saxon huts, and prowled about the doorway of the habitation of man. Dismal and dangerous were the paths then traversed by the lonely wayfarer, for towns and villages lay long and wide apart, and there were but few roads, excepting the long, straight, monotonous highways made by the Romans, or the broken and uncertain bridle-paths, which wound along the dangerous and precipitous banks of the rivers, or at best, in later times, the narrow roads traversed by the ancient merchants, with their trains of pack-horses, who went carefully picking their way through the storms, and snow, and darkness of Winter. Even now in the vast wolds of Yorkshire, and over the wild broad marshes of Lincolnshire, there exists many a miry and dangerous cross-road, where a traveller well acquainted with the country, is, in Winter, in momentary danger of foundering.

Although January is one of the coldest months of the year, it is accompanied with the consolation of knowing that the shortest day is past, and that every sunset brings us nearer to the flowery land of Spring, for on each morrow we hear the chirrup of the sparrow sooner under the caves, and we find the gray dawning peeping in earlier and earlier at the lattice, and looking upon the earth as if to see if any bud has yet broken through its brown sheath, or whether the snow-drop has ventured forth into the cold waste, to shiver alone, and wait companionless for its warmer attendant, the yellow crocus of Spring.

The birds now sit shivering upon the naked branches, and seem cold in spite of their feathery cloaks, while the ground appears black and barren, or it may be that the sad colour of a thick melancholy sky diffuses its gloominess over the earth. We hear not the glad shouts of children upon the hills, among

the lanes, or in the valleys. The woods are bare and desolate; or if a leaf or two remain upon the topmost boughs, they hang like mournful remembrances; undestroyed captives exhibited in triumph. The flowers are all gone: we saw them decay one by one, from the flush of Summer to the straggling ranks of Autumn; while a few stood solitary, and braved the increasing winds, until their rich colours were pale with watching, when they also vanished. Earth, air, and water but a little while since teemed with life; there was a dashing in the rivers, a rustling among the green branches and the long grass, and a sound of mingled voices, filling the fragrant air with harmony; and now all is silent but the turmoil of the elements.

A walk in the country in frosty weather has many charms. The cold clear air gives a healthy glow to the blood, and sends it tingling through the frame. The unclouded sky is intensely blue, and the wide arch of heaven looks higher now than in the Summer. The trees are covered with a beautiful hoar-frost, "scattered," as the Psalmist says, "like ashes;" while in another passage it is compared to "salt poured on the earth, which, being congealed, lieth on the top of sharp stakes." I never look upon this wonderful frostwork without thinking of the feathery silver that hangs ruggedly upon the skirts of the clouds, the floating frostwork of the sky. The grass is hung with it, and may be seen bending in the fields like threads of crystal; and the small bushes appear as if cut from the whitest marble. The hedges, too, are mantled with it, as if May had put out her loveliest blossoms; and the wide woods glitter with the dancing light in which they are robed. Every grove seems illuminated in the sunshine with a dazzling splendour beautiful as the unsullied clouds; and the ruddy squirrel, as it leaps from bough to bough, scatters around a thousand pearls.

Freezing showers often come down with considerable violence at this season: they have not, however, been so prevalent of late as they were years ago. They glaze everything on which they fall; and birds may be seen with their wings so stiffened with ice, that you might take them up in the hand. Showers like these case the boughs of trees as if in crystal, they incrust the

walls of houses, and hang upon the manes of horses: they are thus described by Phillips:

"For every shrub and every blade of grass,
And every pointed thorn, seem'd wrought in glass;
The thick-sprung reeds the watery marshes yield
Seem polish'd lances in a hostile field;
The spreading oak, the beech, and towering pine,
Glazed over, in the freezing ether shine;
The frighted birds the rattling branches shun,
That wave and glitter in the distant sun;
When, if a sudden gust of wind arise,
The brittle forest into atoms flies."

Winter is called a "dead season:" so it is to appearance, although Nature is now busily employed in preparing her gaudy garments for Summer,—

"Shooting her white threads underground."

Take but a brown hard bud from the hedges, dissect it, examine it well with the aid of a microscope, and there you will find the young leaf or tender blossom coiled up in its unsightly sheath, which, when unfolded, displays the tiny green leaf which will ere long open its beauty. Look at the naked branch of a fruit-tree; how barren it appears! no leaf, no blossom, nothing that pleases the eye—it seems fit only for the fire; yet beneath its rough rind there is a mighty Mechanic at work, forming the substances of leaf and bark, bloom and fruit—an unerring Hand guiding the juices through thousands of invisible channels—an unfailing Alchemist, who will hang the rugged boughs with golden fruit before Autumn. Who doeth these things? "Who hath divided a water-course for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder; to cause it to rain on the earth, where no man is; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man; to satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth? Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen."*

The frost often lingers long with us at this period, making the

* Job, chap. xxxviii.

earth hard as iron, and, as before stated, fewer fish would perish were greater care taken in breaking holes in the ice to give them air, and also to supply them with food, especially in ponds and reservoirs. The small birds are now seen hopping about the stack-yards and before the doors in quest of food ; but there are many that never visit man for support even in the most rigorous season ; and we hardly know how they subsist. Some of them require insect food ; and the larks and wagtails forage among the stiff grass and furze-bushes, or by the sides of pools and

ditches, where the Winter-gnat is even now occasionally found sporting in the transient sunbeams. Other birds at this period find insects in a dormant state among mosses, in the decayed trunks of trees, and amid the thatch and crevices of buildings. Hares are now tracked through the snow, which, having fallen to any considerable depth, prevents their escaping. Partridges are easily discovered amongst snow, in which they generally nestle,—in stubble-fields, or the withered fern on heaths. Wild geese are difficult birds to destroy. In Lincolnshire they use stalking-horses to approach them : these are generally made of

straw. The birds usually rest upon a stile or gate, or the lower branch of a tree, or straggling fence that encircles some pool in the marshes: when the person approaches near enough, he elevates himself suddenly and fires. They may be reached within a few yards by this method, if the stalker adopts the precaution of first showing himself at a distance, when their eyes become familiar with the object; but they are always considered shy birds. The hooper, or whistling swan, still visits occasionally the wild fens and marshes, which extend for miles over portions of rushy and reedy Lincolnshire.

The poor robin is universally considered a household bird; many an anecdote is told of his familiarity. He pecks about our doors, and erects his little head or hops around us as if in supplication. He has so many winning ways, that we cannot but love him; and such firm reliance upon us, that we cannot injure him: all the little "wee things" have an affection for poor Bobby. If we turn up the earth, he is always at hand, sometimes daring to alight upon the spade: he often flutters at our windows, and asks as well as he can for food.

He advances first and alone to give the earliest greetings of the new year, with notes clear and brilliant as his eyes, bold and abrupt as his resolute hoppings and determined stand. He might be called the Winter nightingale, only that he never sings after twilight. From a comfortable room at this dead season, it is pleasant to look out upon a robin, as he perches on a naked tree, jerking his sweet tones upon the wintry stillness. In a walk before the gray of evening, it is a still higher gratification to find him, "far from the haunts of care-worn men," upon a slender spray by some high bank, seemingly unconscious of other living things, pouring upon the dreariness of the dell short liquid carols, with long intervals between—converting the frozen steep into a solemn place of devotion, and winning the passenger to a thought of thanksgiving. In infancy the robin was our favourite and familiar, and through life every recollection of him is pleasurable.

Tradition has still rendered him sacred for covering the babes with leaves, and he is protected in all countries with more

reverence than any other bird. Thomson thus sings of his annual visit :—

"Half afraid, he first
Against the window beats ; then brisk alights
On the warm hearth ; then, hopping o'er the floor,
Eyes all the smiling family askance,
And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is ;
Till more familiar grown, the table crumbs
Attract his slender beak."

To a lover of Nature, the woods now offer much worthy of contemplation. The stems of trees with all their mossy branches are no longer concealed by foliage ; the fantastic ramifications are visible, traversing and intersecting each other in unimaginable forms. There is a beauty in this desolation, a wild architecture, admirable in its confusion, a fitting roof for these old temples of the Druids ; branch is interwoven with branch, and spray extended to spray, filling the vacant spaces and uniting the trees together. The ivy also hangs around the oak, covering its mighty bole with dark verdure, while the giant

arms are thrown out in the majesty of naked grandeur. At times the upper part of the boughs, in frosty weather, are covered with a white rime, while underneath their darker barks are seen standing out in deep shadow. The fir, beech, and elm show themselves to great advantage under these circumstances. It is only in Winter that we can observe these beautiful pencillings of the spray, the elegant lines so gracefully intersecting each other. They form a good picture of the busy world: in every little opening some small branch has thrust itself, and become as firmly fixed as the large arm from whence it sprang—all seem bent upon making their way even at the expense of jostling their neighbours.

Winter destroys the beauty of our fields: the winged insects of Summer that people the sunbeams, and hum themselves to sleep in the bosom of the flowers, or spread their deep-dyed wings above the heath-bells, have left the air a silent solitude. Still there are birds with us; and the missel-thrush may now be heard singing, as the country people say, to tell us of the approaching storm. Who is not a lover of birds? They flock around us in Winter, and through cold and hunger forage for their mean subsistence amid our barns, in the farmyard among cattle, and even at our threshold. They fly from one naked spray to another,—nay, they also seem to look down wistfully upon us, as if to excite our pity,—as if they would, if they could, say to the bearers of murderous guns, "Why do you strive to deprive us of our little lives?"

The following are a few of the oldest proverbs relating to January:—

"Janiver is the coldest month in all the year."

"December's frost and January's flood
Never boded the husbandman good."

"Who in Janiver sows oats, gets gold and groats:
Who sows in May, gets little that way.
If Janiver calends be summerly gay,
'Twill be winterly weather till the calends of May."

"As the day lengthens,
So the cold strengthens."

If the last proverb were true, we should have the coldest weather soon after the middle of June.

Occasionally a pale snowdrop will show itself at this time of the year, scarcely distinguishable from the feathery fleeces by which it is surrounded. It is the timid herald of Spring, the pale messenger that announces the singing of birds: but ere the radiant peoplers of the Summer fields appear, it will be sought for in vain. It is seen budding amid the desolation of Winter, cheerless, yet resigned,

"Like hope upon a death-bed;"

peeping calmly abroad amid the shivering tempest, a patient harbinger of sunnier days, pointing to brighter hours amid rattling storms and icy gales. Sometimes we meet them far from the cultivated fields, and then we imagine that children have played there—that the merry laugh has rung over the wilderness, that the blazing hearth has burned where now the snowdrift gathers. Still the lovely flower maintains its beautiful form in the cold air, for heat throws out the petals and destroys its symmetry. It never changeth its hue—never weareth a streak or a tinge, like other flowers; but, wrapt in its own purity, blows amid the snow; and when the amorous Sun makes love to its cold chastity, it withers from his embrace.

The north wind whistles, and the hoar-frost clothes the trees; an uniform white carpet covers the earth, the birds withhold their tuneful song, and the sealed waters cease to murmur as they roll along. The rays of the sun, enfeebled by the density of our atmosphere, shed a gloomy light over the fields, and the heart of man is sad while all nature reposes in torpid tranquillity; still this delicate flower ventures forth alone, starting like an unexpected thought from the mind, like the lonely dove from the ark, to visit the earth for a season, then return to tell whether the young buds burst forth, or the storm still careers over the flowerless valleys.

Evening in Winter! The wind howling across the dreary moors, the snow-drift beating full in your face, and a dense darkness closing upon the brief day; here and there a poor

bird giving a short "twit" among the stacks, or in the hedges, as if to tell you that he is perishing with cold. Then to think how

many there are begging from door to door, not knowing where they shall rest their heads for the night!—Oh, how pleasing is

an English fire-side! The good man of the house seated in his arm-chair in the chimney corner, smoking his long white pipe, sometimes pausing between each whiff, and listening to the din that rages abroad; the good wife busied in knitting warm hose for the little ones, sometimes halting between each stitch and hearkening to the sobbing wind, or exclaiming, in the overflow of her heart, "What a night for those who are on the sea!"—Then the children, eyeing the ruddy blaze, or romping round the house, or playing with the kitten, or perusing their favourite tales of Red Riding-hood, Cinderella, Tom Thumb, or the legend of the Babes in the Wood, and vowing within themselves that next morning they will give robin-redbreast a portion of their breakfast.

Then to turn to the lighted halls of the rich—the dazzling chandeliers, the wine sparkling like liquid ruby in the decanters, the warm carpets, the massive grate throwing out its many tongues of flame; the rich dresses, the beautiful faces on which the light is thrown, the gilded pictures, the classic statues—all that wealth and taste have accumulated for show or comfort; music, the dance, and the song, the "sidelong glance of love;" in short, a a scene of pleasure undimmed by care, where Sorrow shows not her tearful eye. Then to turn

"To huts where poor men lie;"

where squalid Poverty sits by the fireless grate with his face buried in his hands, the piercing wind sweeping the dim rush-light to and fro, the silent snow stealing through the shattered panes, and gathering in drifts upon the cold hearthstone. A group of little children huddled together in a gloomy corner for warmth like shivering birds; their mother the while rocking a little infant in an old rickety chair, and trying in vain to still its piercing cries by offering it the milkless breast. No bed to lie upon; nothing save a few handfuls of straw strewn upon the floor, which is already nearly covered by the snow. No food, and no prospect of obtaining any. Perhaps sickness, let in by hunger, has seated itself upon their pallid cheeks. O that this picture were wholly imaginary! but, alas, it is not! Such a

scene have I witnessed in England, even after an iron-hearted overseer had been acquainted with it. But love kept the sufferers together: for they well knew that if they had allowed themselves to be borne to the poorhouse, they would have been separated, not permitted even to see each other, although it is written, "Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

In country towns, the churches and houses are still decorated with evergreens, which give a lively appearance to the apartments at this dull season of the year. They remain until Twelfth-night, or Old Christmas-day, which is still kept up by many of the lovers of old customs. Merry Old Twelfth-night, I remember thee well, with all thy tempting shows in pastrycooks'

windows!—temples, and cages, and bridges, and huge sugar-covered cakes, on which kings and queens were planted in painted dignity, standing fearless amid dragons and lions and serpents, and churches o'ertopped by white-roofed cottages. And then we had stomachs for all these, and could swallow a church-steeple, or devour a lion without being choked by his mane, or a serpent and not think of his sting. Poor old aunt! I have not forgotten thy large parlour, where we used to assemble on this evening for many a year; nor the old oaken cupboard from which thou wert wont, with a smile on thy face, to draw forth the huge Twelfth-cake. What a shouting and clapping of hands was there when it was placed upon the table! Then what an anxious watching of eager eyes as the large carving-knife grated through the sugary roof, to the imminent peril of the king and queen! And how narrowly each one examined the allotted share, and drew forth the secreted token which announced them as king and queen. Then we were allowed to taste thy home-made wine, which "cheered without inebriating;" and we spent the evening in merry games and cheerful laughter, spinning the trencher, and playing at forfeits.

Then we found plenty to amuse us in the fantastic figures which the frost formed upon glass. What beautiful flowers sprang up beneath the dwarf trees, on the feathery branches of which hung a delicate foliage of silver! and all had been pourtrayed there within a few hours—forests, and trees, and flowers, and shaggy moss, and piled mountains such as our youthful fancies climbed, and thence looked down upon the whitened valley below, where rose castles and towers, and a fanciful landscape outstretched, until out burst the glorious sun, and the whole scenery vanished.

The snow is also very beautiful when it has first fallen. Many of our poets have had recourse to the snow-flake for some of their finest poetical images; nor do I know a fitter emblem of innocence and purity than a falling flake, ere it receives the stain of earth. There are but few things with which we can compare snow for purity. The Psalmist says, "He giveth the snow like wool; he scattereth the hoar-frost

like ashes. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." It is usual to say, "as pale as death." Byron has written, her eyes "were black as death." Milton has also made beautiful allusion to it in his hymn on the Nativity, where he says :—

"It was the Winter wild.
While the Heaven-born Child
All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies ;
Nature in awe to Him.
Had doffed her gaudy trim.
With her great Master so to sympathise ;
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the sun, her lusty paramour.

"Only with speeches fair
She woos the gentle air,
To hide her guilty front with innocent snow,
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame,
The saintly veil of maiden white to throw,
Confounded that her Maker's eyes
Should look so near upon her foul deformities."

How beautiful appears the sky at this season in frosty weather! the full round moon lighting up the whitened earth, and glancing upon tree and turret, mountain and river, in which the glittering stars are mirrored. We gaze upon them and think of the bygone days when our forefathers ploughed the wide waste of waters without compass or chart, guided by the stars alone. The shepherd-boy gazes upward as he returns from foddering his cattle, and thinks of the daisies of summer scattered, like them, on the green earth. Our attention is arrested by their beauty ; we see their dazzling silver twinkling in the deep blue of midnight, and wonder what they are. Oh! they may be worlds like ours, with valleys flower-bordered, and green woods waving under sunny skies. Or are they the abodes of blessed spirits,—beings who have passed through this vale of tears, and are now placed in those starry dwellings, far from care and sorrow?

I know not how to account for the effect snow has upon the air in retarding the progress of sound ; but have often observed that everything which at other times is heard distinct, now seems muffled. The ringing of a bell, shouting, the firing of a

gun, the barking of a dog, all appear far more distant. And in those sounds which we are accustomed to hear daily, the change

is at first surprising. The whole highway is covered with snow several inches thick; the village streets appear silent; you see

the usual stir, but the objects move more like things in dreams. The huge waggon, that at other times shakes the earth with its load, now rolls along, a thing of silence; even the horses' feet are muffled. You are obliged to look sharply behind and around you, or some hasty rider will be upon you as suddenly as if he had sprung from the earth. Even the bullock driven by the butcher lows upon your ear before you are aware of his presence. You see all the snow-covered cottages rising one above another on the hill-side, and dimly gleaming under a white sky, as "if earth and heaven were formed of snow." Then to see the anxiety of the farmers in the morning, going out to examine their fields, looking over the hedges or standing upon some gate to number their sheep; and if they miss one, exploring all the hollows where the snow has drifted, and at last, perhaps, finding it grazing securely knee-deep in some ditch on the few green things that yet remain.

Rosemary buds this month: it was used by our hard-drinking forefathers to stir their foaming tankards. It was also usual to dip this plant in their cups at a wedding, before drinking the health of the new-married couple; and it was borne before the bride at marriages, and sometimes strewed upon the path of the bridal party as they returned from church; the couch was also decorated with rosemary. Shakespere, who took great note of old customs, puts rosemary into the hands of Ophelia, who presents it as a remembrance. The bier of the dead was adorned with it; and we read of a young bride dying on her wedding-day, and that the rosemary, which was destined for her bridal, was used to grace her funeral. In an old play, one of the characters wishes for his friend to have at his funeral

> "A sprig of rosemary, dipt in common water,
> To smell at as they walk along the streets."

Herrick, in his "Hesperides," mentions the rosemary as having been used both when the bridal garments lighted the church porch, and when it was darkened by sable mourning.

Many of the old games, and masques, and mummings, which were in accordance with the simple habits of our homeful fore-

fathers, have long since passed away. A few only remain out of those which it was their delight and amusement to witness; and even these are shorn of their ancient splendour; for, though still picturesque, they have a faded look, and seem no more in keeping with the manners and customs of the present day, than the murrey-coloured coats, and slashed doublets, and trunk hose would be, if dragged forth from the old oaken recesses in which they have lain, disturbed only by the moth for many a long year, and worn again by the present generation. Such as survived the stern mandates of Cromwell, lived through the Restoration of Charles, and withstood all the stormy revolutions which at last settled down when the House of Hanover was securely seated upon the throne, are still within the boundary-line which every year is rapidly cutting through, and into the opening of which the steam-boats and railroads are entering, and overturning nearly all that is picturesque and primitive, that has for centuries given such life and beauty to the rural landscapes of England.

January, with its short days and long nights, though it still comes as of old, with frost, and snow, and cold, and darkness, brings with it once a year its merry Plough Monday, and in a few out-of-the-way country places the village streets are all astir with the little crowd of gaping rustics, just as it was, except for the changes in costume and architecture, three or four centuries ago. The old fiddler, who dates every incident in his life from the many country wakes, feasts, and statutes he has attended, is again in requisition, although the snow lies deep upon the ground; the drum, which only sounds at the club-feast, or on such occasions as these, is again dragged from its hiding-place; and sometimes the old-fashioned pipe and tabor, which have been blown and beaten by the descendants of the same family, through many generations, are called in to awaken the sleeping echoes of Winter. You hear the noisy group long before they heave into sight, along the winding lane engirded with its high and leafless hedges—green only where the ivy trails, or the prickly holly shoots up; they are announced by the loud huzzas which rend the air, and are followed by all the

loiterers who have congregated from the villages for miles around.

Heralding the way, come the healthy-looking, round, chubby-faced country lads, waving their hats and caps, regardless of the cold; their heavy boots crunching the snow at every step, and their hard, naked hands nearly blue or purple through exposure to the frosty air. They are followed by pipe and tabor, fiddle and drum. Then appears a strong, healthy-looking ploughman, with his heavy ankle-boots, worsted stockings, stout corduroy breeches, and thick plush waistcoat, over which he wears a gown, borrowed for the occasion of Nanny or Molly, and the skirt of which he generally tucks up under his waistcoat until he enters the village, to keep it from draggling; and, thus arrayed, with bonnet and cap on head, he comes dancing along, about as gracefully as a brown shaggy bear, and rattling the money-box, which he carries in his hand, at every step, for he is the Betsy, so famous in the olden time as the chief *figurante* on a Plough Monday. Next follows the plough, drawn by ten or a dozen stout countrymen, by ropes either thrown over their shoulders or fastened around their waists, while their hats or white smock frocks are decorated with ribbons of almost all colours, amid which are placed bunches of ears of corn; he who guides the plough being ornamented like another Ceres, and doubtless, like her, intended to represent the emblems of plenty. Next appear the thrashers with their flails, and reapers with their hooks, waggoners with long whips dangling over their shoulders; bringing before the eye the whole procession of harvest, from the plougher, the sower, the reaper, the thrasher, down to the dusty miller, who has covered himself with an extra coat of meal for the occasion, and has come to take toll out of the proceeds of the day.

While writing, the scene rises before the eye as distinctly as when in our boyish days, about twenty years ago, we stood a happy spectator, regardless of Winter:—

> "Clothed all in freize,
> Chattering his teeth for cold, that did him chill;
> Whilst on his hoary beard his breath did freeze."

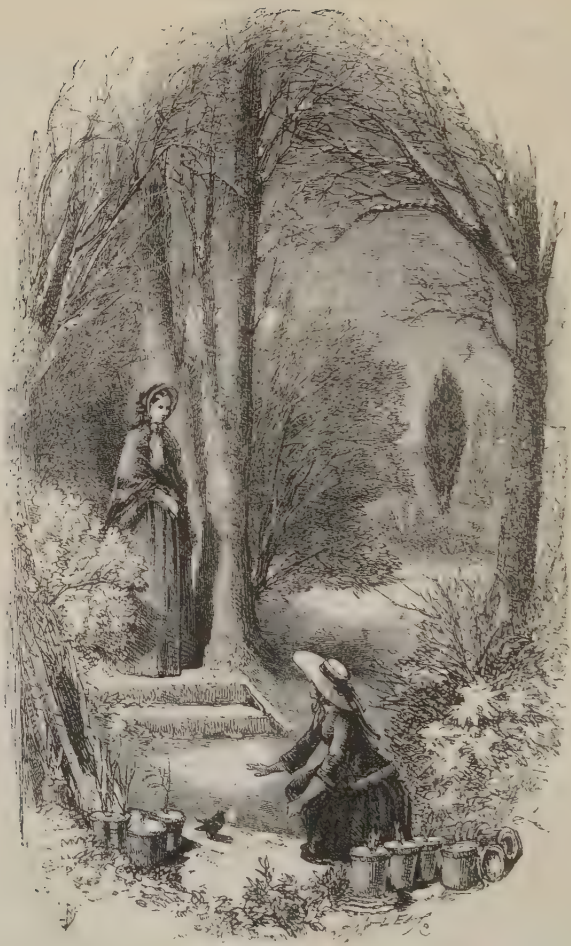
We again see the big farm-house, with its ivy-covered porch, in which the jolly farmer, with his top-boots, blue coat, and pipe in mouth, stood beside his buxom and merry-faced wife, looking on with as much apparent pleasure as the little children, who rested their hands on the topmost and frost-covered bar of the gate which they had climbed. What he dropped into "Betsy" the ploughman's box fell with a heavy sound, causing the bonneted bearer to rattle it with extra force, and to cut a variety of most unladylike capers. Then came the great brown jug, filled with mighty ale, which seemed quite a load even for the strong arm of the stout dairy-maid who bore it; little Jack the farmer's boy, followed with large drinking-horns, and a basket filled with such huge hunches of bread and cheese as showed that the worthy giver knew right well how to measure a ploughman's appetite. Then pipe and tabor, and drum and violin, were mute for several minutes, and all the sound heard, excepting an occasional huzza, was like that of a dozen horses crunching and feeding together. The jug was again refilled and emptied; and so they passed on from house to house until they at last came to one where a noted miser resided. They knocked at the door—there was no answer. "Betsy" rattled his box louder than ever, but no one came; drum, tabor, pipe, and violin, thundered and screamed in vain; huzza after huzza was sent forth by the assembled crowd, but excepting a stealthy peep from behind the blind, and which would have cost the waiting-maid her place had she been discovered by the old curmudgeon, no other sign of life appeared within. "Gee-ho! Come up!" exclaimed the man who held the stilts or handles of the plough, and in a moment the deep bright share was into the ground; backwards and forwards it went, cutting deeper, and the men pulling stronger at every furrow they made, until the whole lawn at the front of the miser's house lay brown, bare, and ridgy, as a newly-ploughed field. When the mischief was done the old miser made his appearance, and threatened the ploughman with law, imprisonment, transportation; but no one seemed to advocate his cause. It was an old custom thus to plough up the ground at the front of the doors of those who

gave not "largesse" on Plough Monday; nor do we remember a single instance of prosecution for the misdemeanour. Such abuses, however, we doubt not, have been instrumental in abolishing those old and useless customs. What we have here presented is a faithful portraiture of rural England only twenty-five years ago; and there are still, we believe, a few green, quiet corners in our island, where Plough Monday is kept up in the present day. We have here preserved the outline of a faint and faded picture, the rich colouring of which began to decay from the very hour when Cromwell and his Roundheads shut up the ancient gallery of old English amusements. It was opened again at the Restoration of Charles; but the damp and the mildew had settled down upon it. A new race of men had sprung up, and a mighty change, which is still advancing, began to show itself throughout the land—the merry England of our forefathers was growing into the working and thinking England in which we now live.

> "The race of yore,
> Who danced our infancy upon their knee,
> And told our marvelling boyhood legends store,
> Of their strange ventures happ'd by land or sea;
> How are they blotted from the things that be!"

Few, unless they are well versed in geology, would dream of the appearance which our island presented in those early years that have passed away unnumbered by man, but which have left traces of their existence beneath the hills and valleys we daily tread. The landscape, which at this season of the year is leafless, and sometimes buried in its winding-sheet of snow, was thousands of years ago adorned with flowers, and fruits, and trees, which now only blossom and ripen, and wave in the far-off sunny lands of the East. Then the huge hippopotamus wallowed in our rivers, and the mammoth and the mastodon shook those old (and ages-ago-buried) forests beneath their tread. In the excavations of railways, in the very heart of our ancient hills, and in the deep beds of our beautiful rivers, do we find the remains of these extinct monsters,—the dam and its offspring sometimes buried side by side, a convincing proof that here the young were

once bred, lived, and died. Amid the giant ferns of this early world, which have dwindled down to the knee-deep bracken through which we now tread, did the striped and sabre-toothed tiger couch, ages before his angry growl ever fell upon any human ear. Then the great cave bear went prowling about our island; and herds of wolves and jackals pursued the maned and shaggy bison through the forest fastnesses. The huge elk, whose remains have been discovered, and the span of whose antlers from the tip of each horn was above thirteen feet, fed upon our hills, and stooped down to drink by the sides of our rivers, in those undated ages; for the shadow of man had not as yet been mirrored upon the face of those waters. Birds, whose gaudy plumage is now only to be seen in tropical forests, then plumed themselves in the sunshine on the boughs of such trees as never again threw their green shadows over that deep-buried and untrodden soil. Then our island was houseless, our seas mastless, nor had the print of any human foot as yet indented the sand upon our shore. Such a knowledge as this, wherever we may wander, causes us never to feel solitary.



END OF WINTER.

HEAVY FALL OF SNOW—WINTER WINDS—VALENTINE-DAY—SIGNS OF SPRING—HARE-COURSING—OLD SUPERSTITIONS—WINTER AMUSEMENTS.

WINTER still reigns, though there are hours, and sometimes days, when there is a primrose colour about the sky, which

looks as if Spring were peeping out from somewhere behind the warm-tinted clouds, to see if the earth is prepared for her descent. But the birds are, with an exception or two, either silent or hidden, the cattle which gave such a charm to the landscape are nowhere to be seen, and if you hear the pitiful bleating of some newly-dropped lamb coming painfully through the air, which is bitter cold, you feel as sorry for it as you would were it the cry of a lost child that sounded through the solitude. You also miss the figures that dotted the landscape while following their rural employments; not a whistle nor a shout are heard; there are no voices of children ringing through the lanes, only the firing of a gun here and there, which seems to leave the landscape more silent and solitary after the report has died away.

For want of other objects to interest you, you watch the snow falling upon the dark and turbid river, see flake after flake touch the water and dissolve in an instant; sometimes the lines of falling snow cross one another, looking like long strings of white flowers dropped from the sky slantwise, or two flakes become lovingly united, and so embracing perish. But there is something very solemn in the appearance of the country covered with snow, especially if you look over a portion of it that is uninhabited, for all is white, silent, and ghastly. Then, if you think of such scenes and such Winters as the Ettrick Shepherd has described in his "Calendar," you will call to mind how the sheeted snow has many a time formed a shroud above the dead. Hogg makes mention of a snow-storm which drifted to such a depth in the mountain-passes as almost to have reached the tops of the trees. For thirteen days and nights did the snow fall without ceasing, causing hundreds of sheep to sink into a heavy, cold, motionless sleep, from which they never again awoke. He says, that so many died, walls were made of their dead bodies to screen those from the cold which remained alive—that whole flocks were buried beneath the snow, and no one could tell where they were lost until the drift melted away, when the bodies were found with the heads all turned one way. "Numbers," he says, "were swept away by the floods which followed;

and near one place, at a stoppage in the river, nearly two thousand sheep and one hundred and eighty hares were found dead. Shepherds went about," he tells us, "boring into the snow with their long poles, and scarcely found a single sheep in a quarter of an hour; until, at last, a shepherd-dog seemed clearly to understand what they were searching for, and running about upon the snow, he began to scratch and look at the shepherds, as if to draw their attention to him, and in every spot he pointed out they found a sheep beneath, and through the assistance of the dog were enabled to save two hundred, which, without his sagacity, must have been lost."

But even snow has its bright side. and it is no unpleasant sight to witness a lot of good-natured healthy boys, dividing into parties and snow-balling each other, and seeming to enjoy the sport as much as some dogs do that of rolling in the snow. Or to watch them building up a snow-man, as they call it. The

trouble they have to make his arms stick on, the number of times they fail before they can get on his great heavy head, and then to hear their merry shouting when the pleasant work is finished. But oh, the idol-breakers! with what delight they set to and demolish the hideous image which it has taken them so many hours to build up. Do any of them ever moralize, we wonder, while looking at or joining in the work of destruction? How we wish Shakespere had made the melancholy Jacques soliloquize over the demolition of a snow-man.

"February-fill-dike" is an appropriate name for the damp month, which comes in with the end of Winter; but we know that "the time of the singing of birds" is at hand, and bear patiently the dearth and desolation which reigns around us, and look upon the lengthening of the days as sure heralds of coming sunshine and flowers. Hark! how the wind roars; and the leafless trees still sway their naked forms to and fro, and toss their skeleton arms in the air like maniacs; for there is a loud howling in the "savage woods," a roar of clashing branches and uprooted trees, as if Fingal led his warriors forth to battle, and had commenced the "stormy strife," while Ossian twanged his wild harp to the gale. How wonderful are the winds! we feel their power, and shrink beneath it, yet see them not: the ocean is uplifted by their might, the angry waves lash the sky, navies are destroyed, and forests are blown down, yet we see not the arm which strikes.

> "He plants his footsteps on the sea,
> And rides upon the storm."

And beautiful are some of these sublime passages in holy writ:—"He did fly upon the wings of the wind;" "the heaven was black with wind;" "there came a wind from the wilderness." "The wind blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell." "He gathereth the wind in his fists." "The wind shall eat up all thy pastures." "And the wind was in their wings." "Like a wave driven with the wind and tossed."—All these, and numberless other passages, show what an eye the holy writers had for the poetry of the elements.

March is generally considered the month of winds, but in

February we often feel their power; when the blinding sleet is blown into our faces, and the dense rain comes streaming down our cheeks.

The close of Winter brought with it Valentine Day; the season of billing and cooing, when youthful lovers have a most mysterious affection for hearts and darts, wings and rings, Cupids and altars, and no end of nameless emblems surrounded with lace-edged paper, and borders of flowers in all kinds of unnatural colours, which hang temptingly in the windows, and greatly bewilder the senses of both youth and maiden, while they gaze. What a fluttering there is amongst young hearts, what a trembling bashfulness do the fairer purchasers display if the vendor of these cherished love-tokens chances to be a handsome young country shopman, assuring him, should he request permission to write the address, that they have only purchased it to please a young friend, and that on no account should they themselves think of sending such nonsensical trifles. "Oh dear no! on no account."

But St. Valentine's is a day of little harmless deceits; it seems to have been dedicated to disguised handwritings and false signatures; when letters that are only sent to the next door are posted a mile or two away, yet, strange ending of all, each fond lover hopes to be detected through this thin disguise. What a knowing and important look does the postman assume on the morning of Valentine Day, especially in the country, where almost every rustic maiden is known to him personally, and where he is as confident as if he had opened and read the missive, that it is not the only messenger of love that has been sent, and he can give a shrewd guess as to whence and from whom the little packet has been despatched. The country barmaid seems rather more demure on such a morning; and even hard-handed and red-armed Betty looks brighter about the eyes than the tin and copper utensils which she daily scours—coming to the door ever and anon—peeping down the road, and wondering whatever it is that makes John, the postman, so late. Then the ostler has a struggle with Betty in the kitchen, endeavouring to get a peep at her Valentine; while the postboy looks with eyes askance

upon Jane, the barmaid, on whom he is, as they say in the country, "rather sweet." He finds more to do than usual in the stable amongst his horses, whistles a great deal to himself, and when asked by the pretty flirt what is the matter, answers, "Oh, nothing at all!" wondering all the while to himself who can have had the impudence to write to Jane, and only wishing that he knew. She, perhaps, to make him a little jealous, has bought and posted the Valentine, and addressed it to herself, for such manœuvres are occasionally practised by the maidens when they wish to bring a distant lover to the point at issue.

Another picture which we have seen of Valentine Day would have looked well in the minute painting of a Wilkie. The fond old mother, with her spectacles on, reading the Valentine to her husband, who smiled as he listened attentively to every line, which said,

> "The rose is red, the violet's blue,
> Carnation's sweet, and so *is* you.
>
> The ring is round and has no end,
> So is my love to Mary, my friend.
>
> First we cast lots, and then we drew,
> Kind fortune said it must be you."

While the pretty daughter to whom these old-fashioned lines were directed sat with her hands clasped together on her knees, looking thoughtfully in the fire, and wondering to herself whether or not William really meant what he had written, and if he loved her truly, as much as he pretended to do. Then when she had retired to rest, the old people would sit down and think over what they could spare Mary towards housekeeping, when she married, and they would enumerate nearly everything they possessed, and deprive themselves of many little necessary articles, to add to the comforts of Mary, for ten to one they knew William's mind much better than she did, as the lover and the intended father-in-law had often met on a Saturday evening at the Plough, where, over a pint and a pipe, they had discussed the whole affair, even down to what they should provide for dinner on the wedding-day.

Many antiquarians have endeavoured in vain to unravel the origin and mystery of Valentine Day, but their labours have hitherto been in vain; if discovered, it would likely enough be as unmeaning as the source from whence so many of our old customs have sprung, and not worth the labour wasted. Our ancestors were pretty close observers of nature, and there is but little doubt that, as they noticed the birds, which first begin to build and pair at this period, when the weather was favourable, so natural an occurrence might lead to youths and maidens imitating the custom by selecting lovers, glad of any amusement after the dark mid-winter had passed, and that Valentine Day had no other origin. As far back as we have been enabled to trace this love-making day, we find it linked with the mating of birds, which seems inseparable from St. Valentine; and we are at a loss to imagine how the worthy bishop, whose name is associated with it, first fell into such company.

The earliest Valentines were nothing more than slips of paper, on which the names of both sexes were written: they were placed apart, the men drawing from a pile on which the women's names were endorsed, and they again taking the first they touched from the opposite heap. These names were worn for a number of days, sometimes inside the coat, waistcoat, or bodice, sometimes only on the sleeve, just as the feigned or real lover intended to express his passion; and there is no doubt but that such a game, begun in jest, ended at times in earnest, and that by this means, many of our forefathers won their fair brides.

Even in our own day (and in the country the harmless superstition still exists), the first maiden we met on this auspicious morning was considered our Valentine, and as such was hailed; and no little trouble do the rustic lovers put themselves to occasionally, to meet the one on whom their choice has before been fixed. We can remember ourselves in the hey-day of youth being foolish enough to walk two miles in the snow and darkness, and waiting until the cottage door opened, to claim a cherry-cheeked farmer's daughter for our Valentine. Too poor, perhaps, to purchase the printed epistle, with Cupid's altar, hearts, and doves, we presented the original, and thereby saved both paper

and postage. Gay, in his "Shepherd's Week," thus describes this old superstition :—

> "Last Valentine, the day when birds of kind
> Their paramours with mutual chirpings find,
> I early rose, just at the break of day,
> Before the sun had chased the stars away.
> A-field I went, amid the morning dew,
> To milk my kine (for so should housewives do);
> Thee first I spied; and the first swain we see,
> In spite of fortune shall our true-love be."

We have in our possession, framed and glazed, a Valentine which was sent to a dear old lady we well knew, more than half a century ago. It must have taken many hours to have cut out the hearts and diamonds in scissor-work, and painted the border which surrounds the unsailor-like looking gentleman, who is standing under a tree, and pointing to his ship. Both Chaucer and Lydgate make mention of Valentine Day; for the "Morning Star of Poetry" says—

> "Blessed be Saint Valentine,
> For on his day I chose you to be mine—
> Without repenting, my heart sweet;"

—proof that five hundred years ago it was celebrated in England.

Towards the close of February, if the weather is fine, the gardeners begin to bestir themselves. You see the little children out beside the cottages, with their tiny spades, assisting to clear away the withered weeds, and delighted at the fire that is kindled to burn up the rubbish, into which they thrust almost everything they can lay hold of that will burn. Days are longer, and they remain out to the very last minute it is light, to play in the village street. Such a picture have we now before us. The scene is a rough-hewn wall dividing a church-yard from the high-road: on the opposite ascent stand a row of little cottages, which overlook the low stony barrier, and command a view of the resting-places of the dead. A plot of grass, that already wears a green Spring look, slopes down to the edge of the high-road, beside which a clear water-course goes tinkling into the distant valley, then empties itself into a deep sluice, which goes murmuring along through the dark flood-gates that open into a

neighbouring river. The stream is crossed by a strong plank, which leads to the cottages. Some of the children are throwing stones and bits of sticks into the stream; others are watching them float away, and anxious that this boat, as they call it, should beat the other. Cold as it still is, a little boy and girl are sitting on the sloping greensward; their mother, who stands sewing at the cottage door, has twice warned them that they will take cold unless they get up, but they pay no regard to her; two others are sitting astride the low church wall; a third is jerking stones into the brook. Lower down another group are running after each other. Beyond these you see the light from the blacksmith's shop falling faintly across the road. Most of the cottage doors are open, for, although only as yet February, the air is as mild as if it were April. An artist might sketch such a scene for a Summer evening, were it not that the trees are still leafless; for the little green on the elders beside the brook, and the tiny buds on the gooseberry-bushes, are as yet the only heralds that proclaim the coming of Spring.

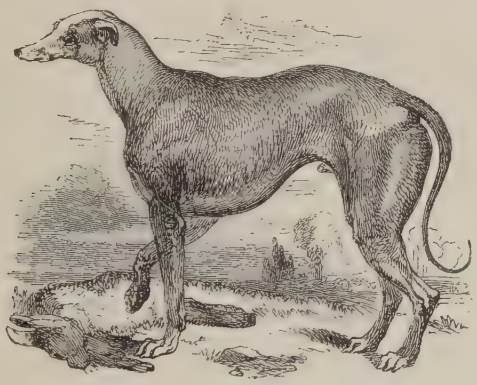
Hare-coursing on a fine frosty day is a glorious recreation. There ought not to be any snow on the ground. It is a sport that both horsemen and pedestrians can enjoy, as the turnings are often made in sight, in a fine open country. A wild wide heath is a beautiful spot to select, with patches of gorse here and there, and straggling clumps of bushes. Those who sneer at coursing ought not to forget that it is a classical sport, and was followed by the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Look at that brace of greyhounds in the leash: saw ye ever anything more beautiful? "The speed of thought is in their limbs;" no antelope was ever seen lighter of foot than they are, no doe more graceful, no race-horse more perfectly built for running: look at their fore-legs, they are straight as arrows; their loins bent like the bow Diana herself bears; their necks elastic as a swan's; their ears long and soft as silk purses; their heads sharp as a snake's; and their eyes bold, bright, and beautiful as a mountain maid's when she first recognizes the form of her lover through the golden mist; and their chests are broad and full as Donald's, who, wrapp'd in his plaid comes to return her greeting.

When at full speed, they cover the ground like the shadow of a graceful branch, tapering away until it is invisible like their tails, which honest Mat Prior must have been thinking about when he wrote the so-often-misquoted line of—

"Fine by degrees, and beautifully less."

True, he applies it to the bosom and graceful waist of a lady, the only object in creation we can place above the beauty of a greyhound, especially such as one of those we have now in our eye,



so alike, that one could not be distinguished from the other, saving for the collar, which the laws of coursing require one should wear when there is so close a resemblance between them, as if they had grown together,

"Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet a union in partition—
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;"

and, above all, of that rich fawn-colour which we so much admire. Look how the beautiful creatures tug at the leash, all eye, all ear.

Hush! hark! that "Soho" comes from the finder; there the hare goes—a true racer by the build of her, she steals away and

does not appear to be much alarmed. The dogs have heard the "Soho;" they see the hare—look how they rear up and tug at the leash. The judge has his calm eye on poor puss, he will at least give her fourscore yards start, and his practised eye can measure the ground almost to a yard. Look how steadily both the dogs bear on the collar, The word "Go" is given, and just "at the self-same beat of Time's grey wings" they are off together, nose to nose, ear to ear—there is not the thickness of a walking-stick between them in distance at the moment of starting. Now the hare pricks up her ears—she caught the halloo given when the slipper started them. Danger and death dog thy heels, poor hare; and unless thou shouldst reach yonder distant covert, seen dimly from hence, thy fate is sealed. How they gain upon her, how they cover the ground! They seem to touch her; one has overshot himself and she is turned; he must have been some distance ahead to keep the lead as he still does, or he would have driven the hare into blue-collar's mouth. See! she is making back to the covert whence she was first started: this the inside dog perceives, by the short cut he is making—that is hardly fair, my fine fellow, although you will gain a point by your policy. Well done! he has got the lead by that manœuvre, and blue-collar is now behind, though he has followed her fairly and not missed a yard of ground she went over, excepting when he overshot himself. Hurrah! blue-collar gains on the other dog, and see he has turned her again; he is the swiftest and the stoutest dog, for at that speed such sudden turning must be distressing—no race-horse in the world could jerk round so instantaneously—it is done before one has time to say "It lightens." Now they are doubling back; there are fences for you—saw you ever so clear a leap? That was no wrench, but a fair turn—the third blue-collar has made. Where is the hare making to? if to yonder high, old hawthorn hedge, and she has a run only known to herself, she will escape, unless the gap is large enough for the dogs to creep through it. That old, high, thick, long hedge has never been cut within the memory of man, and there is neither horse nor dog in the world able to clear it. It is as we expected; she has escaped—there is no kill, and there the course is ended.

The point's in favour of blue-collar beyond all doubt, whether the prize be for a silver collar, a cup, or five hundred good pounds. We will not trouble our readers with an explanation of all the technical phrases used in hare-coursing, beyond stating that the points are, "A go-by, a cote, a turn, a wrench, a tripping, a jerking, and a hill of merit;" as some of these appear to be synonymous, and the true meaning of one or two is doubtful, being as old at least as the time of Queen Elizabeth, we can only refer our readers to the rules of Mr. Thacker, which are acknowledged by all coursers to be the fairest, clearest, and most satisfactory that were ever drawn up.

What years this imaginary run after the poor hare seems to have carried us back, while we laid down our pen for a few moments, filled a pipe, and sat smoking and looking into the fire without seeing anything there. Warton-wood, Lea-wood-side, Foxby Lane, Somerby-on-the-hills, Stowe, Fillingham, Kirton, Spittal, Lincoln, and the wide range of hills on either hand. Away, away sailed Memory, and peopled these beloved places with many a dear face and form, near whose graves the hares now feed at midnight undisturbed. We cared not then, however bleak or biting the Winter mornings might be, so long as we could see the fox-hounds "throw off," or the hare coursed, though often compelled, in some of those wild, houseless places, to appease the pangs of hunger by devouring a frozen turnip, one bite of which would now set every tooth on edge. How often have we seen some countryman, as he joined us in this chilly meal, kick the cakes of snow off his heavy boots, when they flew a yard or two from him, with every nail of his boot soles imprinted on the rejected and hard-trodden snow-cakes, the very weight of which made you marvel how he had been able to move at all with such clogs on his feet. Then what ditches we cleared, even with less care than we now cross a gutter.

Many people wonder how the peasant passes his time during the Winter, not knowing that one of his amusements is found in signs and omens. He calculates the quantity of rain which has fallen during the night by the height of his pond, and ascertains

the direction of the wind by the smoke of his chimney. If the sun rises red and fiery, he calculates upon wind or rain; he also

expects rain when the swallow flies low, and keeps dipping the tips of her wings in the water. When ducks and geese are

unusually clamorous, he looks for it; and when bees do not leave their hives, when swine and poultry roll themselves in the dust, pigeons seek the water, and cats wash their faces, he also expects wet. When flies sting and become troublesome; when dogs and cats grow uneasy, and fall asleep; when cattle stretch out their necks, and snuff the air, or assemble in a corner of the field, then he feels sure of a shower. Frogs croaking, peacocks calling, spiders crawling on the walls, worms coming out of the earth, cocks crowing and clapping their wings at unusual hours, toads leaving their holes, moles throwing up the earth, asses shaking their ears and braying, oxen licking their fore-feet, or bats squeaking or entering houses,—these, and many others, are the peasant's calendar, and he seldom fails in approaching pretty near to the truth from one or other of these signs. If we turn to Virgil, we shall there see a great many similar signs enumerated. Even the sailor has his signs upon the desolate ocean, and dreads the gathering of foam, or the congregating of stormy petrels in the wake of the vessel.

But it is only in the country where you find superstition in its real benighted state; in those quiet retired villages where new customs and new creeds but rarely enter—where the son hoards up the traditions of his father until the old man is no more, and he himself grows grey and again narrates them to his children. Many a "wise man" and age-bent fortune-telling old woman yet reside in the hamlets of England; and many a fair maid endeavours to regulate her life and fix her expectations according to the half-muttered prophecy of the old sibyl. Thousands yet believe that the howling of a dog denotes death, that pigs can see the wind, and that those who are born in the night can never see ghosts. To put on your stockings the wrong side outwards without knowing it is a sign of good luck; while a bright spark in the candle signifies a letter containing good news, and bubbles upon your tea tell that you will be rich. You must carry a portion of a coffin in your pocket to keep away the cramp, hang your stockings up crosswise to keep off the nightmare, and spit upon the first piece of coin you receive in a morning that you may have good luck—the last practice

I have often witnessed. When your cheek burns some one is supposed to be talking about you; when your ears glow they are telling lies of you; if your nose itches you will be vexed; and if your right eye itches you will have good luck,—should the left itch you will have bad. To lend a friend a knife or a pair of scissors is to cut friendship; and to give a person a light between Christmas and Twelfth Night is to bring upon yourself ill fortune all that year. I recollect well losing the good will of my old grandmother by allowing a benighted waggoner to light his lanthorn while her back was turned; and it was many a week before the old lady forgave me. It is unlucky to meet a person who squints; one magpie denotes sorrow, two luck, three a wedding, and four death.

Were I to enumerate all the superstitions that have come under my own observations, I should fill several pages of this volume. Charms are commonly worn for the ague, a complaint that is very prevalent in the fens; and if the secret scroll is once opened, there is supposed to be no chance of a cure. Horse-shoes still continue to be nailed to the thresholds of doors to keep out the witch; and if hollow cinders leap from the fire, they are believed to represent coffins, and the persons at whose feet they fall are looked upon as half dead. To spill salt is to draw upon yourself so many days of sorrow, even to the number of the grains overturned. I know many persons whose pockets are never without a small portion of the rowan-tree, which whoever carries may defy the devil and all his works; and often at one corner of their purses will be discovered a bent coin, which is considered lucky. When first you hear the cuckoo sing, you should have money in your pocket if you wish to be fortunate. Indeed I believe our ancestors considered it unlucky to be without money at any time; and we moderns have retained a strong phrase which marks poverty as an unwelcome guest—an empty pocket being proverbially the abode of the devil. Formerly there was a great charm in always having a guinea in your pocket: I have forgotten the tradition, but no one has yet arisen to consider it unlucky. Tusser, in his "Goode Husbandrie," has preserved many of these old practices, and enu-

merates several customs which our antiquaries have not yet taken the trouble to investigate.

Many old superstitions remain unaltered in those remote villages, where changes but rarely take place; and much more may be gathered respecting the intellectual standard of our peasantry from these superstitions than some might be led to imagine. Superstitious people are easy of belief, soon imposed upon, and I have often remarked that they are generally very honest. But in the country they cannot avoid becoming superstitious: the various traditions connected with the different spots they have to pass,—tales of murders committed, people buried, sights seen there which have never been disputed,—and their being out in the night during lambing-time, and on other occasions, together with their having to be so much alone, leave them leisure to think of these things. Then there are no lamps burning at night in the village streets; the great woods and silent fields are close at hand; the trees, so familiar by day, assume strange shapes in the shadowy and uncertain light, voices of animals heard not at daytime, sound ominously through the stillness, as they wander through the darkness in quest of prey. Added to this, there is something in darkness and silence allied to death, and you cannot, when alone at such a time in

the country, help thinking of the grave, where, as Chaucer says in four simple words,

"There is no company."

It may be argued that reading and thinking would free the mind from these trammels. But what did the ignorant country-people read in my younger days? Why, there were more works sold entitled "The Fortune-Teller's Guide," "The Interpretation of Dreams," "On Mole-Marks on the Skin," "The Whole Art of Palmistry," and such like, to the silly credulous country-people, than of any other works, excepting, perhaps, song-books. They had very few to instruct them; for cheap literature was not then what it is now, and no marvel that they were believers in ghosts, dreams, omens, and spirits, as their fathers and mothers were before them.

"Our Saxon ancestors," says Verstegan, "called February *Sprout-kele;* by kele meaning the kele-wort, which we now call the colewort, and which our gardeners have corrupted into collard, a very hardy Winter cabbage. In times long past it was about the only Winter green known and used by our ancestors, and the broth made therewith was also called kele. For before we borrowed the term potage from the French, the only two words that had the same signification were in our language called *kele* and *wort:* and as this kele-wort, or potage herb, was the chief Winter-wort for the sustenance of the husbandman, so was it the first herb that in this month began to yield wholesome young sprouts;—it consequently gave it the name of *Sprout-kele.* But the Saxons likewise called this month Salmonath, which Dr. Frank Sayers, in his 'Disquisition,' says is explained by Bede, and rendered by Spelman, in an inedited manuscript, '*Pancake* month,' because in the course of it cakes were offered to Sol, the sun." But, according to Fosbroke, Pancake-day is held in remembrance of the heathen goddess, Fornax, who first invented ovens; while Brand contends that we borrowed the custom from the Greeks. From whom did we borrow the frying-pan?

The custom of ringing pancake-bell still exists in several parts of the country, and it is considered unlucky to commence frying

them before the bell has rung. Cock-fighting matches also take place at this time ; and Shrovetide is a general holiday in the country, when foot-ball, wrestling, nor-spell, and other games, are played. There is not perhaps a more healthful game in existence than that of foot-ball : the shouting, the struggling of the opposite parties, "forty feet kicking like one," and all trying to drive it as many ways ; while some little urchin crouches under the legs of his taller adversaries, and calling "Time," bears it off to a remote corner of the field, where he enjoys the first kick. These are the pictures that give animation to a village-common. I abominate cock-fighting—it is a cruel pastime ; while foot-ball, snow-balling, cricket-matches, and such like sports, do no harm, but much good, by bringing health to the frame, and at night sound slumber.

But Winter is at last awakened from his long sleep, and begins to look around him, for he feels the snow melting, and the flowers breaking through the ground on which he has so long slept. He fancies, at times, that he hears Spring sighing somewhere near at hand, like a captive pining to be set free, and he remembers how her breathing gave warmth to the snow, and first formed the snowdrop, and that ever after she sent the little flower as her herald to tell him that the time of his departure was at hand, "for the flowers are appearing on the earth, and the time of the singing birds is at hand."

We contemplate with pleasure this change of the season, in

which we feel a growing delight, an increased sensation of happiness, a filling up of hope, as we now tread upon the verge of Spring. The days are lengthening rapidly, the sun increases his power, here and there a bud is visible, the water-runnels rumble through the meadows, and young lambs are seen bounding over the fields. Sometimes a solitary skylark wings its way up the clear blue of heaven, filling for a few moments the silent sky with music; the thrush, also, sends forth its sweet song through the valleys, as if rejoicing in the increasing sunshine, while bird follows bird, when the weather is very fine, in vocal rivalry—not

as in the full swell of Spring's harmony, but as if attempting to make it known to their neighbours of field or forest that they have again begun to usher in the Spring. And yet how imperceptibly the changes take place! First a single flower or two appear; then a whole row are seen budding; another day and another succeeds, and whole tufts of them have blown. Some gooseberry, or currant-bush, in spite of our close observation, bursts upon us unaware,—perhaps its situation is the most favoured by the sun,—and we behold it, with pleasure, covered with tiny leaves, the very foliage of a fairy forest. A day or two ago, and we saw nothing but little brown buds, their tiny heads slightly dotted with green; a few mild days, and they have

burst forth from their prison-houses in the pale-green array of Spring. But, perhaps, before we have walked round the garden or field, the sky darkens, and in an hour or so, the rain, snow, and sleet are again descending.

We look upon a flower springing up on the skirts of Spring, and braving with its frail beauty storm and rain, as upon youth stepping forth into a world which it has created without thought of Winter! and what visions of hope does the early primrose bring! what weeks of tempest and darkness are forgotten when it steps forth, bringing with it a promise of brighter hours—dreams of many a coming flower—days without a cloud! For now we may exclaim—

"The snow has left the cottage-top;
The thatch-moss grows in brighter green;
And eaves in quick succession drop,
Where grinning icicles have been,
Pit-patting with a pleasant noise
In tubs set by the cottage-door."—CLARE.

LONDON:
R. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD STREET HILL.

BOUND BY
BURN
37 & 38
KIRBY ST.